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# Downsizing the United States Air Force Security Forces: A Phenomenological Investigation

Winell de Mesa  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Winell de Mesa

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Walden University  
2015

Abstract

Downsizing the United States Air Force Security Forces: A Phenomenological  
Investigation

by

Winell S. de Mesa

MS, University of Central Florida, 2005

BA, University of South Florida, 2003

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

June 2015

## Abstract

The United States Air Force (USAF) has downsized an average of 10,000 active duty personnel each year from 1990 to 2010. Despite this downsizing, the mission remains the same, which increases the workload on the remaining airmen, lowers morale, decreases specialization, changes the mindset/culture, accelerates promotion rates, and shifts the dependence on technology in the Security Forces career field. The USAF needs adequately sized and proficient members to meet its mission. This phenomenological study examined the effects of USAF downsizing on the USAF Security Forces career field. The great man theory, social learning theory, theory of expertise, and Maslow's hierarchy of needs provided the conceptual framework. Semistructured interviews were gathered with a purposeful sample of 24 retired Security Forces members, near Air Combat Command bases; data were then analyzed through the Moustaukas modified van Kaam technique. The themes from this study were the cycle of downsizing; increased workload despite decreased number of personnel, also known as "more with less"; an accelerated promotion rate; and dependence on technology. The primary finding suggested the need for specialization and consistency of technology used. Further research on downsizing based on budgetary constraints, awareness of the loss of specializations after downsizing, and communication while downsizing could expand the findings of this study. The results of this study can be used by all leadership facing budgetary constraints and technology upgrades. Social change could ensue if leadership observes the cultural changes that occur when choosing to downsize and merge.

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## Dedication

This study was inspired from the conversations and shared frustrations that I have experienced in the Security Forces career field. As I progressed through the ranks and moved to different locations, I noticed the challenges and frustrations I faced were shared by many people. While the locations and names changed from base to base, the key points of the conversations were all similar: we lost our law enforcement knowledge and leadership styles changed. Unfortunately, I was not able to find any empirical evidence on our shared frustrations, which is why I chose to do this study.

I dedicate this study to the great men and women that I have had the pleasure of serving with during my Air Force career. In no way was this study conducted to put a negative light on our career field. I hope that we, as defenders and airmen, can improve from the findings of this study and that we can continue to uphold the standards of our proud culture. Thank you to all the great men and women that took the time to mentor me, this is for you... this is for us.

## Acknowledgments

Psalms 34:1-8

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The United States Air Force (USAF) has downsized every year since 1990 (Sundberg, 2013). However, despite this downsizing, the USAF's mission remains the same, which causes an increase in workload to the remaining airmen and may lead to challenges in the future (Kleykamp, 2010). An organization can benefit by downsizing through cost reductions to operations (Jivan, 2012). After a downsizing effort, the same organization may encounter workload challenges with its remaining employees (the survivors) that can lead to decreased job proficiency and lower levels of expertise (Landsbergis, Grzywacz, & LaMontagne, 2012). The objective of this research study was to explore the effects the USAF's downsizing efforts have had on the Security Forces career field.

### **Background of the Problem**

Since 1945, the United States military has downsized after its major conflicts: (a) World War II, (b) Vietnam, (c) The Cold War, (d) Operation Desert Storm, (e) Operation New Dawn/Operation Iraqi Freedom, and (f) Operations Enduring Freedom (Gauchat, Wallace, Borch, & Scott, 2011). In 1990, there were 535,233 military personnel in the USAF, in 2000 there were 355,654, and in 2010 there were 331,700 (Sundberg, 2013). Downsizing the military presents challenges with job proficiency and level of expertise (Daghfous, Belkhodja, & Angell, 2013; Habel & Klarmann, 2014; Hernandez, 2012; Hosek, 2011; Sharp, 2012).

In this study I explored the positive and negative personal lived experiences of retired USAF Security Forces personnel during the USAF downsizing efforts between

1990 and 2013. Because such a study had not been conducted, it was necessary to explore and analyze the effects downsizing has had on the USAF Security Forces career field over time.

### **Problem Statement**

An average downsizing of 10,000 active duty personnel each year occurred in the USAF from 1990 to 2010 (Sundberg, 2013). Furthermore, the USAF's leadership downsized the number of active duty military members from 535,233 to 331,700 within two decades, between 1990 and 2010 (Sundberg, 2013). It is critical for an organization's leaders to assess the effects of downsizing to avoid the adverse effects of reducing personnel (Cascio, 2011). Leaders and managers need to mitigate this problem because an incorrectly downsized organization can experience difficulty meeting its objectives (Vicente-Lorente & Zuniga-Vicente, 2012), while the loss of experienced employees can compromise an organization's capabilities (Ngirande & Nel, 2012).

The general business problem is that the USAF leadership may not realize the effects of its downsizing efforts (Iverson & Zatzick, 2011). The specific business problem is that downsizing may affect USAF Security Forces job proficiencies and the levels of expertise in the USAF Security Forces personnel. This may result in a loss of productivity, effectiveness, and efficiency (Luan, Tien, & Chi, 2013).

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the effects of the USAF's downsizing efforts from 1980 to 2013 through the lived experiences of USAF Security Forces members. The phenomenological design, through semistructured

interviews, explored the lived experiences of those who have survived the USAF's downsizing efforts, have held a supervisory position, and retired in the last 10 years from the USAF Security Forces career field.

The personnel represented in this study are retired USAF enlisted ranks of E-6 (Technical Sergeant) through E-9 (Chief Master Sergeant), and the retired USAF commissioned officer ranks of O-3 (Captain) through O-5 (Lieutenant Colonel) within the 10 bases included in the Air Combat Command region.

The goal for this study was to capture and explore the effects of downsizing on the USAF Security Forces career field and present those findings to the leadership of the USAF Security Forces. The leaders of many downsized civilian organizations never realize the long-term effects of their decisions to downsize (Iverson & Zatzick, 2011). Because of the unrealized effects of downsizing, and that a downsizing study has not been conducted on the USAF Security Forces career field, there was a need to capture the short-term, long-term, and holistic effects of downsizing on USAF Forces personnel (Sundberg, 2013).

### **Nature of the Study**

In this doctoral study, I used a van Kaam qualitative phenomenological approach, observing individuals' experiences within a larger phenomenon to understand its nature or essence (Reiter, Stewart, & Brice, 2011; Wertz et al., 2011). According to Mitchell and Jolley (2012), a qualitative study allows for collecting and analyzing data to provide an in-depth exposition of a given phenomenon. The advantage of a qualitative research



study is the richness of the data collected in interviews and focus group discussions (Allwood, 2012).

A van Kaam qualitative phenomenological approach involves empirical research for capturing individuals' lived experiences within a certain phenomenon and describes the common shared experience of the group (Reiter et al., 2011). In this doctoral study, semistructured interviews revealed participants' lived experiences, and captured the effects of the USAF's downsizing efforts on military personnel between 1980 and 2013.

A van Kaam qualitative phenomenological approach brought forth and analyzed the lived experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). A qualitative approach fit this study because this methodology is optimal when exploring an individual's lived experiences (Rowley, 2012). Alternately, a quantitative approach was inappropriate because it is utilized when there is a need to test a theory to prove or disprove a hypothesis (Malina, Nørreklit, & Selto, 2011).

Additionally, a mixed-methods approach uses both qualitative and quantitative methods (Malina et al., 2011). The purpose of this study was to capture the lived experiences of the participant pool and not prove or disprove a theory; therefore, a mixed methods approach was not appropriate for this study.

### **Research Question**

This qualitative phenomenological study explored how the USAF Security Forces career field's job expertise, skill level, and operations have changed between 1980 and 2013 in the midst of the USAF's downsizing efforts. I captured the effects of downsizing on the USAF Security Forces career field through the lived experiences of 24 USAF

Security Forces members who have survived the USAF downsizing efforts and have retired in the last 10 years. For a qualitative study, interview questions that begin with *what*, *why*, and *how* help researchers to collect lived experience data (Qu & Dumay, 2012). I directed the questions toward significant milestones in the participants' careers, including deployments, times of change, and introduction of new technology. The main research question was: What are the effects of USAF downsizing efforts on the Security Forces' career field?

### **Interview Questions**

The following were the interview questions for this study:

1. How many years of service did you have in the United States Air Force?
2. What were the leadership positions you held during your career?
3. How many reductions in forces (RIFs), or downsizings, did you experience during your career?
4. In your experience, how has the USAF Security Forces career field changed from your enlistment/commission date through your retirement date?
5. What personal or social changes did you see or experience in the Air Force, which you perceived to be related to downsizing?
6. Considering your lived experiences what is the difference with the level of mission proficiency now (after downsizing) compared to how it was (before downsizing)?
7. In your experience, how have your responsibilities and expected job duties changed with each rank level as an effect of downsizing? (Airmen, Non

Commissioned Officer, Senior Non Commissioned Officer, Company Grade Officer, Field Grade Officer)

8. In your experience, how have the behaviors and actions of personnel in each rank level changed over time as an effect of downsizing? (Airmen, Non Commissioned Officer, Senior Non Commissioned Officer, Company Grade Officer, Field Grade Officer)
9. How has mentoring and leadership development changed, as an effect of downsizing, over the course of your career?
10. What are the short-term and long-term effects of downsizing that you have experienced?
11. In your experience, how have the wars we have fought changed the USAF's downsizing strategy?
12. In your experience, with relation to downsizing, have advancements in technology changed the USAF with relation to downsizing?
13. Considering your experience, how have advancements in technology changed your job description in the USAF as an effect of downsizing?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Theoretical and conceptual frameworks direct the growth of knowledge (Bocken, Short, Rana, & Evans, 2013). The conceptual framework that supported this study focused on how continuity and experience cultivate and develop job expertise and skill level (Maxwell, 2012). The great man theory, theory of expertise, and social learning theory all provided a contextual framework for this qualitative phenomenological study

(Kutz, 2011; Morgan, 2012; Shantz, Alfes, Truss, & Soane, 2013; Truss, Shantz, Soane, Alfes, & Delbridge, 2013; Zaccaro, 2012).

Through this study I analyzed the collected information from the interviews using Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is explained through levels as follows: (a) Level 1—physiological needs, (b) Level 2—safety needs, (c) Level 3—belongingness and love needs, (d) Level 4—self-esteem needs, and (e) Level 5—self-actualization.

The great man theory advocates that people have innate leadership skills and abilities, but in societies that are more modern, skills can be learned through relationships and mentorship (Hoffman, Woehr, Maldagen-Youngjohn, & Lyons, 2011). Successful work performance can be attributed to lived experiences and coaching (Gruman & Saks, 2011). The theory of expertise advocates that expertise is a reflection of the mastery of available knowledge or performance standards and relates to skills that mentors and teachers have taught (Truss et al., 2013). Social learning theory's basic premise is that consequences modify behaviors (Morgan, 2012). In a work setting, social learning theory implies that skill development occurs through imitation and observation of mentors and coworkers. Morgan (2012) suggested that performance may improve if an employee has supervisors or coworkers that are able to demonstrate desirable behaviors.

Researchers have found that having a proficient workforce is critical to an organization's meeting its objectives (Bockerman & Maliranta, 2012; Boyd, Tuckey, & Winefield, 2014). A proficient workforce is capable in terms of skill level and expertise

(Hall, 2012). I explored the effects downsizing has had on the USAF Security Forces career field and workforce proficiency.

Current employees are not comfortable with downsizing for many reasons, but job security is the prominent reason (Soparnot, 2011). Chipunza and Samuel (2011) claimed that because of downsizing, employees may not put forth their best effort, and they may instead focus on survival and personal interests, which can discourage existing and potential employees. Through this study, I captured and explored the effects of downsizing on the USAF Security Forces career field.

It may be beneficial to the USAF if leadership chooses to diversify by using contractor services, rather than downsizing altogether (Rehman & Naeem, 2012). However, while hiring contractors can provide an interim solution, the USAF may be limiting service options. This limitation can work against the USAF during times of crisis because survivors of downsizing performing at lower levels due to stress (Rehman & Naeem, 2012). Lack of specialization due to downsizing increases the likeliness of loss of specific job sets due to inadequate changeover or personnel (Chhinzer & Currie, 2014).

Downsizing may affect an organization's cohesiveness, a factor that is vital to all organizations and is critical in the defense industry (Habel & Karmann, 2014; Vicente-Lorente & Zuniga-Vicente, 2012). Those targeted by downsizing efforts have certain skills, and these skill sets may not be present in the survivors of the downsizing, thereby disrupting an organization's cohesiveness (Rehman & Naeem, 2012). Disintegration is possible because the survivors may not specialize in a job skill, which may make them

incapable of achieving the same level of proficiency and service (Flint, Maher, & Wielemaker, 2012).

### **Definitions of Terms**

*Downsizing:* Downsizing is the restructuring of an organization and its mission and vision statements to reduce the cost of production with the intention to increase company profitability (Green & Kirton, 2011).

*Delaying:* Delaying is the elimination of managerial-level staff with the intent to reduce the cost of operation (Gandolfi & Hansson, 2011).

*Furlough:* A furlough is a temporary unpaid leave of employees to meet an organization's financial needs (Cascio, 2011).

*Reduction in forces (RIF):* A RIF is a reduction of military members to reduce the costs of sustaining a military workforce. RIFs can be either voluntary or involuntary. Voluntary RIFs in the past have offered current military members early retirements and severance bonuses as options prior to the involuntary RIF (Kleykamp, 2010).

*Redundancy:* Redundancy refers to unnecessary processes and personnel in an organization. Through downsizing, an organization's leadership reengineers processes and personnel structure to reduce expenses (Klehe, Zikic, Van Vianen, & De Pater, 2011).

*Survivors:* Survivors are employees who remain after the downsizing of an organization (William, Burch, & Mitchell, 2014).

*Survivor syndrome:* Survivor syndrome is the anxiety caused by the thought of maltreatment, internal tension, diminished self-respect, lack of inventiveness, uncertainty,

and inconsistent sense of culpability at having survived organizational downsizing efforts (Williams, Khan, & Naumann, 2011).

*Uncertainty:* Uncertainty with regard to downsizing refers to unpredictable events in a given environment that may impose the possibility of disturbance to its operations and performance. Uncertainty influences most organizational decisions, shapes people's interaction, exists in different forms of systems, and determines performance of an organization (Kreye, Goh, Newnes, & Goodwin, 2012).

*Underutilization:* Underutilization is the existence of numerous process variations that lead to redundancy, including too many employees in an organization, which negatively impacts an organization (Palley, 2011).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

#### **Assumptions**

In this study I made several assumptions. The first assumption was that open-ended questions elicit truthful responses that are beneficial to the phenomenological qualitative study. Also, due to participants' length of service, I assumed that they were competent leaders and followers. A longer length in service increases the likelihood that an employee is loyal and has a positive opinion of the organization they work for (Klehe et al., 2011; Smith, Holtom, & Mitchell, 2011).

#### **Limitations**

In this doctoral study, all interviewed participants were retired USAF Security Forces members living within the Air Combat Command region. The participants are personnel who have retired in the last 10 years. I assessed the following limited areas:

downsizing's perceived effects on Security Forces job proficiency, level of expertise, and overall operations.

There were potential limitations to this study. For this study I did not randomly select participants, and the sample size of 24 participants could have been too small to be representative of the population (Allwood, 2012). If the participant pool was too small to reach theme saturation, I would have interviewed additional retirees. Due to time and budgetary restraints, such as travel limitation, the participants were all representative of the same Air Force Major Command region.

Participants' answers provided limited information in qualitative research (Cherney et al., 2013). To avoid this limitation, predetermined questions guided me as the researcher to avoid losing track of what information to obtain from the participant. Open-ended questions allowed for flexibility and assured semistructured interviews met the objective of exploring and capturing the effects of downsizing on the USAF Security Forces career field, with the focus between 1980 and 2013.

Qualitative research is more vulnerable to research bias when compared to quantitative research, especially with the use of questionnaires or interviews (Fox, Gouthro, Morakabati, & Brackstone, 2014). I minimized, if not eliminated, bias by preparing for all interviews. To avoid affecting the answers of the participants, the study contained clearly-worded, neutral questions, and avoided leading or suggestive lines of questioning (Qu & Dumay, 2012).



**Delimitations**

This study was delimited to the effects that downsizing has had on the retired USAF Security Forces career field technically, professionally, and socially. Because the study only captured the lived experiences of retired commissioned and enlisted Security Forces members in the Air Combat Command, I explored the downsizing effects on the USAF Security Forces career field through the lived experiences of these members. Reliability and validity are related to the study's findings and conclusions, which I addressed through assuring the credibility of the participants' responses.

**Significance of the Study**

Financial pressures have forced the USAF to reduce costs of manpower, or downsize, and continuously seek efficiencies (Sundberg, 2013). Downsizing an organization yields different results, including negative impacts such as (a) loss of specialization, (b) loss of experience, and (c) reduced production as well as positive impacts such as (a) reduced underutilization, (b) reduction of waste, and (c) regained control of budgetary constraints (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2011; Munoz-Bullon & Sanchez-Bueno, 2014; Tsai & Shih, 2012). The USAF leadership changed its organizational structure through downsizing and reorganization between 1948 and 2013, and there is a need to assess the effects of these changes (Sundberg, 2013). Within this study I analyzed the perceived impact downsizing has had on the USAF Security Forces career field between 1980 and 2013.

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

By exploring the effects of the USAF's downsizing efforts on the Security Forces career field, I addressed the need to explore the effects of downsizing has had on the USAF (Sundberg, 2013). Analyses of participants' responses provide USAF Security Forces leadership knowledge of the effects downsizing has had on skill level, proficiency, and Security Forces culture between 1980 and 2013. The lived experiences of participants provide insight for management on how to improve strategies and their implementation for downsizing.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Downsizing has an effect on society as a whole. Replacing human personnel with technology can improve an organization's leaders' abilities to increase flexibility and performance (Wolff, 2012). Implementation of technology may save money, diversify resources, and reallocate funds to other parts of the economy—resulting in positive social change for the organization, increased profits for the organization and its stakeholders, improved job performance, and job satisfaction among employees (Wolff, 2012).

However, altering the USAF personnel may have negative effects. Replacing airmen with technology, contractors, or civilians can affect the continuity, knowledge, and expertise of the career field (Bergek, Berggren, Magnusson, & Hobday, 2013; Hernandez, 2012). In addition to a decrease in job proficiency and level of expertise, downsizing may change the culture of the organization (Bragger, Kutcher, Menier, Sessa, & Summer, 2013; Hall, 2012; Luan et al., 2013; Norman, 2012; Schmidt, Borzillo, & Probst, 2012). In the civilian sector, some leadership of downsized organizations never

realize the long-term effects of their decisions to downsize (Iverson & Zatzick, 2011).

Through this research study, I explored downsizing's effects within the USAF Security Forces career field.

### **A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

This review of professional and academic literature covers the misconceptions and reasons why an organization's leadership chooses to downsize, the role of management and communication during the downsizing process, and common results and alternatives to downsizing. The intent of the literature review was to examine the decisions and actions that take place before, during, and after an organization's leadership chooses to downsize. Based on the problem statement and conceptual model, the professional and academic literature selected for the review was focused on (a) the implementation, (b) the effects, and (c) the alternatives of downsizing. Within the review, there are three main aspects of downsizing that have informed this research project: that downsizing should be approached through (a) long consideration, (b) slow implementation with constant assessment, and (c) good communication throughout the entire process. Ninety percent (100 out of 111) of the references are from peer-reviewed journals published within the past 5 years (since 2011).

There are many factors to consider before making a decision to downsize (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013). The reasons for downsizing at an organization influence and affect the results (Lamm, Tosti-Kharas, & King, 2014). Downsizing's results are influenced by (a) effective communication during downsizing efforts, (b) recognition of potential effects of downsizing, (c) implementation strategy,

and (d) the organization's management team (Bockerman & Maliranta, 2012; Gandolfi & Hansson, 2011). Prior to a downsizing decision, stakeholders and managers should be aware of the misconceptions and facts about downsizing (Lamm et al., 2014; Soparnot, 2011; Vermeulen, 2011). Findings from previous studies have shown different effects of downsizing on different organizations (Lamm et al., 2014; Scott, 2012; William-Lee et al., 2014). However, there are no studies that have examined the effects of downsizing on the USAF Security Forces career field.

### **Misconceptions of Downsizing**

There are misconceptions associated with downsizing that can confuse the empirical results and add difficulty to an organization's decision-making process (Cherney, Head, Boreham, Povey, & Ferguson, 2013; Jordan, Brown, Trevino, & Finkelstein, 2013; Osipova, 2012). Hossfield (2013) detailed some of the realities and incorrect assumptions about downsizing. The first misconception is that downsizing will reduce the long-term costs of operations and recurrent expenses. Employee salaries are one form of recurrent expenditures, which should be controlled by ensuring that the organization has the appropriate number of employees (Hossfield, 2013). Maintaining the appropriate number of employees may help an organization survive the financial constraints the organization faces. Furthermore, Hossfield (2013) noted that downsizing employees does not guarantee an organization will avoid failure. According to Fallon and Rice (2011), profitability is not a guaranteed result of downsizing. Downsizing does not always lead to long-term improvements in production quality. Decreased morale, stress,

burnout, and loss of loyalty are effects survivors can experience after downsizing (Fallon & Rice, 2011).

A misconception is that downsizing can solve organizational problems.

Downsizing is a decision to change the structure of an organization during budgetary constraints, but poor management and poor decision making during downsizing may lead an organization to failure (Soparnot, 2011). Organizations should carefully carry out downsizing efforts because the execution of downsizing efforts will determine the outcome and future success of the organization (Osipova, 2012). Successful downsizing can result from proper planning and effective communication throughout the process (Tsai & Shih, 2012). When all stakeholders are aware of the intent, a well-planned and correctly implemented downsizing effort can produce positive results (Brown et al, 2013; Chuang, Liu, & Tsai, 2012; Daniels et al., 2013).

### **Costs Associated with a Large Workforce**

Salaries and other personnel-related costs contribute to a large percentage of an organization's recurring expenses (Gandolfi & Littler, 2012). A large workforce promotes specialization, a concept that results in high quality and effectiveness in production and service delivery but can run the risk of underutilization (Chhinzer & Currie, 2014). Specialization is a measure of each employee's contribution to the organization (Scott, 2012). When an organization is not able to maximize employee contribution, the organization may downsize to maximize the contributions of the survivors (Schmidt et al., 2012). A larger workforce offers some advantages to the organization; flexibility, innovativeness, and reliability. A smaller workforce may reduce

the overall level of production, but encourages maximum contribution by employees (Chhinzer & Currie, 2014).

### **Budgetary Constraints**

The primary goal of downsizing is to lower operational costs through the reduction of employees (Beckmann, Hielscher, & Pies, 2014; Chen, Crossland, & Luo, 2014; Park & Shaw, 2013). Organizations spend a considerable amount of money on employee salaries and benefits; therefore, when faced with budgetary constraints, many organizations choose to downsize their employees (Shook & Roth, 2011). Downsizing can help organizations meet objectives and become profitable again (Chen et al., 2014). The main reason to downsize is to reduce expenses and regain control of the organization's budget (Chen et al., 2014; Van Dierendonck & Jacobs, 2012).

However, downsizing to meet budgetary constraints may not always be beneficial because organizational leadership should make appropriate decisions prior to enacting any change (Chipunza & Samuel, 2013). By downsizing employees, an organization may need to provide and account for the training cost of new employees after financial recovery (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011; Cascio, 2011; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013). Downsizing of experienced workers may compromise an organization's production capabilities, products, and services (Ngirande & Nel, 2012).

According to Fallon and Rice (2011), poor financial conditions and budgetary constraints lead to a reduction in profitability, which may motivate an organization to downsize. Organizational leadership should consider downsizing only if the expenses exceed the organization's profits or if the organization operates where profit and

expenses are matched (Cascio, 2011). An organization should strive to remain profitable by reducing its expenses or by concentrating on ways to maximize profit (Dwyer & Arbelo, 2012). While it is difficult to be continuously profitable, management and stakeholders should offer an appropriate plan that will justify downsizing despite the potential impact on job security (Stangleman & Rhodes, 2014). Downsizing is expensive, and the organization should be aware of what to expect. A decision to downsize should be structured and not an event driven solely by the financial aspect (Gandolfi & Littler, 2012).

According to Chen, Crossland, and Luo (2014) only a fully-utilized workforce can efficiently meet its objectives. Full utilization assures that all employees contribute equally to the organization. An organization should employ and utilize its workforce based on its needs. When a service or employee is no longer beneficial to the organization, the service or employee needs to be downsized (Gandolfi & Hansson, 2011).

### **Underutilization**

Underutilization is a reason why downsizing employees may benefit an organization (Greene & Kirton, 2011). In some cases, an organization may be in a position where it has too many employees doing the same job. An excess of workers brings a risk of underutilization of employees (Chen et al., 2014). In an organization with too many employees, the cost to maintain a high number of employees rises regardless of the costs of production (Gandolfi & Hansson, 2011). Downsizing to decrease overemployment may produce positive gain for an organization.

Upon recognition that an organization is not meeting its objectives, management must evaluate the decision to downsize (Munoz-Bullon & Sanchez-Bueno, 2014) and properly plan prior to its decision (Cerra, 2012). An incorrectly downsized organization may experience difficulty meeting its objectives (Vicente-Lorente & Zuniga-Vicente, 2012). When downsizing creates vacancies, survivors are often expected to work harder to close the gap (Beckmann et al., 2014).

### **Technology**

Technology shortens production cycles and reduces costs associated with waste and human dependency (Botta, Muldner, Hawkey, & Beznosov, 2011). The introduction of new technology may replace functions traditionally performed by employees (Wolff, 2012). Due to this decreased dependency on manpower, organizational leadership may decide to downsize in favor of implementing new technology. However, because replacing human labor with technology can impact job security and morale, an organization should consider these outcomes when downsizing (Cascio, 2011).

### **Role of Management in the Downsizing Process**

To manage a downsizing process, it is necessary to identify the need, affected employees, and the best implementation strategy (Burnes & Cooke, 2012). Not all organizations can use the same downsizing strategy due to each having its own objectives and structures (Dwyer & Arbelo, 2012). It is common that an organization's process and structures may evolve and change. Therefore, management should understand the changing needs of their organization and use the best strategy to address this challenge (Stangleman & Rhodes, 2014).



The optimum way to approach a downsizing process is to recognize the need to downsize, and then develop a strategy to achieve the organization's objectives (Dwyer & Arbelo, 2012). Management should identify the critical services and employees (Beckmann et al., 2014; Norman, 2012), and then determine what each contributes to the organization's objectives (Dwyer & Arbelo, 2012). Management should prioritize the objectives of the organization, understand the reasons and consequences of eliminating personnel, and identify a possible replacement among the survivors (Stangleman & Rhodes, 2014).

An organization should not downsize a large number of employees all at once because this may make the transition difficult for the survivors (Bragger et al., 2013). Instead, downsizing should be a methodical process, completed over an extended period of time. A segmented process allows management to modify plans to prevent unwanted consequences (Burnes & Cooke, 2012).

Management should also emotionally detach itself from the organization when making decisions to downsize (Dwyer & Arbelo, 2012). Hill, Seo, Kang, and Taylor (2012) suggested that emotional separation reduces the possibility of overlooking key decision points and allows for an objective decision. Emotional separation increases the likelihood that survivors will adapt to downsizing, and management will not assume responsibility for employees' personal reactions (Berglund, Furaker, & Vulkan, 2014; Neves, 2014).

Effective management, which is vital for the continued success of an organization, requires proper balancing between current performances, stakeholders'

interests, and meeting future objectives (Klehe et al., 2011). Limiting damage caused by downsizing may be costly but such damage can be minimized through proper decision making during the process (Chuang, Liu, & Tsai, 2012). Downsizing is a challenging endeavor, and management should be cognizant of the organization's goals and objectives before taking action. This cognitive process may reduce the potential of downsizing employees who are beneficial to the organization (Chipunza & Samuel, 2011).

To ensure that the organization performs well after downsizing, management should assess the organizational culture and climate (Flint et al., 2012; Marshall, 2011). Jordan and Battaglio (2014) suggested that managers meet with human resources management to assess the potential impact of downsizing and ease the transition for surviving employees. Availability of voluntary counseling and employment assistance for downsized employees is paramount in providing continuity and training of new job responsibilities for survivors (Flint et al., 2012; Marshall, 2011).

### **Role of Communication When Downsizing**

Hill et al. (2012) found communication to be the prime concern among downsized organizations. Communication influences the experience of downsizing due to negative and positive aspects of communication in an organizational downsizing process (Hill et al., 2012). The organizational culture and its ability to meet objectives are dependent upon communication within the organization (Fallon & Rice, 2011). Organizations without effective communication may fail to meet objectives, compromise the quality of goods or services they provide, and increase the possibility of survivor syndrome

(Iverson & Zitzack, 2011; Lakshman, Ramaswami, Alas, Kabongo, & Pandian, 2013).

Poor communication may create tension between the organization and the stakeholders, and may increase the difficulty in managing the organization (Burnes & Cooke, 2012).

Management should inform employees of the intent to downsize (Chipunza & Samuel, 2013). Because a well-informed workforce is likely to be more productive during and after downsizing, organizations should state their intent to downsize (William-Lee et al., 2014). Furthermore, open and timely communication may ensure confidence among the employees. If the information provided by the organization is not clear, then the workforce may focus its attention on personal interests to prepare for a possible downsizing (Burnes & Cooke, 2012). Communication should be official and should identify employees vulnerable to downsizing. This can reassure a sense of job security and reduce the occurrence of survivor syndrome in identified survivors, which may increase and continue to focus and put forth a positive effort at work. Moreover, notifying employees vulnerable to downsizing can provide time for them to find employment, facilitate their transition, and preserve their dignity (Fallon & Rice, 2011).

The use of appropriate structures of communication may prevent the spread of rumors and may reduce anxiety caused by uncertainty (Fallon & Rice, 2011).

Furthermore, during the downsizing process, it is beneficial to provide employees a means to voice their concerns to management (Chipunza & Samuel, 2013).

Burnes and Cooke (2012) stated that to facilitate the downsizing process, the leadership should communicate with workforce and provide as much information as possible. Providing assistance to employees who will be downsized and addressing the

emotional needs and new responsibilities of remaining employees may help all employees cope with the downsizing process (Modrek & Cullen, 2013; Osipova, 2012).

Mazzei and Ravazzani (2011) posited that employees of downsized organizations may view communication as either negative or lacking. Employees of downsizing organizations shared that managers fail to share timely, relevant downsizing information. Hill et al. (2012) highlighted the importance of proper channels of communication from management to employees whenever any organizational change will occur. Throughout the downsizing process, management must communicate vital information to employees to relieve stress and uncertainty among employees, which affect their performance (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2011).

Chipunza and Samuel (2011) discovered that how an organization communicates with its employees before, during, and after the downsizing process influences the success of the process, the quality of life of survivors, and the performance of the organization. The aspect of open and honest communication is crucial to employees' acceptance and participation in the downsizing process (Cotter & Fouad, 2013) and keeps employees aware of the changes that will take place (Chipunza & Samuel, 2011; Hill, Seo, Kang, & Taylor, 2012).

For the survivors, having the management share general financial status and competitive information demonstrates an organization's willingness to communicate and may establish a sense of trust and honesty (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2011). Communication of management to employees positively affects employees' commitment and performance (Chipunza & Samuel, 2011). Furthermore, Chipunza and Samuel (2011)

found that maintaining open communication during downsizing efforts keeps survivor morale and commitment high after an organizational downsizing.

### **Results of Downsizing**

The reasons to downsize influence the results an organization may experience after downsizing (Lamm et al., 2014; Rehman & Naeem, 2012; William-Lee et al., 2014). Organizations that downsize due to economic challenges may reduce costs of operations, which may reduce production or service delivery (Norman, 2012).

Different factors influence the decision to downsize senior and junior employees because each group has different relevance to the organization (Scott, 2012). A decision to downsize employees may result in a loss of experienced workers (Schmidt et al., 2012). Downsizing senior personnel may lead to fewer employees downsized due to the reduction of larger salaries; however, this may cause failure to make timely decisions due to a lack of experience and appropriate skill levels among remaining employees (Scott, 2012). Downsizing junior employees, who may contribute to decision implementation, may cause the organization to fail to produce enough products or provide adequate services to meet objectives and expectations (Scott, 2012). Some possible challenges that result from downsizing are poor financial performance in the future and a lack of experienced and skilled employees (Cotter & Fouad, 2013). Some organizations may fail to return to peak levels of performance after downsizing because their reduced workforce is unable to increase production levels (Iverson & Zitzack, 2011; Lakshman et al., 2013; Neves, 2014). It is the responsibility of senior management to consider all interests and maintain the appropriate number of employees in an organization (Daniels et al., 2013).

William-Lee, Burch, and Mitchell (2014) noted that there may be tension among the survivors due to job security. Job security is a motivating factor, and loss of job security can divert or divide employee attention (Hall, 2012; Modrek & Cullen, 2013). Diverted and divided attention of employees affects an organization's performance, its capacity to grow, and its ability to accomplish goals and objectives (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2011).

Rehman and Naeem (2012) found that downsizing is a viable strategy for coping with financial difficulties but may cause poor performance by survivors. Munoz-Bullon and Sanchez-Bueno (2014) discovered a negative relationship between downsizing and organizational performance. The organization is likely to experience relatively lower performance levels in the years following a downsizing event.

Norman (2012) found that there are effects that go beyond organizational performance and may affect an employee's personal life. Divided employee concentration may lead to employees' increased concerns over their job security, the presence of survivor syndrome, and unemployment. Divided employee concentration may have repercussions for an organization. Lack of concentration and divided attention may result in reduced quality and the wasting of raw material during production (Tsai & Shih, 2012). An organization may avoid these costs if it communicates the effects to the stakeholders and workforce (Tang, Lai, & Cheng, 2012).

### **Alternatives to Downsizing**

At times, some organizations may have difficulties managing expenses. Furthermore, some organizations may choose to downsize the number of employees

while others may choose to form mergers and acquisitions to regain profitability (Kang, 2012). Fallon and Rice (2011) stated that to solve financial problems, organizations should consider alternatives prior to downsizing. The alternatives include an evaluation of opportunities to pursue increased production, use of furloughs, and mergers.

Soparnot (2011) found that increasing production increases revenue, which may allow an organization to manage its recurrent expenditures and minimize underutilization. Mitchell and Jolley (2012) suggested that an organization should try to operate at full capacity regardless of its budgetary constraints but should reevaluate the organization's interests. Increased production can reduce the cost of training newer employees, maintain current employees, and allow an organization to meet recurrent costs during difficult economic times (Williams, Khan, & Naumann, 2011).

Succession planning involves training current employees to address future needs for key roles and positions, transfers within the organization, and work sharing (Williams et al., 2011). According to Lee and Sanders (2013), a furlough, or temporary unpaid leave of employees, is one way to alleviate financial stress. Shook and Roth (2011) stated that reorganizational moves do not guarantee the success of a company. Moreover, it is advisable for the management to evaluate which options are cost-effective and sustainable (Shook & Roth, 2011). In the event an organization chooses to downsize, it must be willing to formulate and execute proper planning to manage the process and avoid future failure (Shook & Roth, 2011).

Mergers come with consequences that may be undesirable. Shook and Roth (2011) suggested that mergers reduce an organization's decision-making ability and

flexibility due to the need for an agreement with all stakeholders. Changes in decision-making and flexibility are concerns for organizational growth (Cotter & Fouad, 2013). Moreover, Shook and Roth (2011) noted that mergers deny an organization the opportunity to work as a single entity. However, an organization may benefit from a merger because it may be able to consolidate resources and help it manage its expenses during difficult financial times. The intent of mergers is to add value and resources to the organization, and to help manage its expenses (Kang, 2012). A planned merger during difficult financial times may improve an organization's chances for survival and safeguard the interests of the stakeholders and employees (Munoz-Bullon & Sanchez-Bueno, 2014).

### **Transition and Summary**

Downsizing may lead to reduced production, ability, and lack of specialization (Cotter & Fouad, 2013). There is a need to consider other options to manage the cost of maintaining the size of the organization before downsizing. A large workforce offers an organization flexibility, innovativeness, and specialization (Chhinzer & Currie, 2014). Rehman and Naeem (2012) stated that downsizing negatively impacts employee loyalty, commitment, and job security. These undesirable effects may negatively affect employee performance and the organization's performance after downsizing (Rehman & Naeem, 2012). A downsized workforce may lead to a smaller, less experienced workforce that may perform at a lower level years after the downsizing effort (Munoz-Bullon & Sanchez-Bueno, 2014). Downsizing an organization may reduce the workforce's ability to meet its objectives (Iverson & Zatzick, 2011; Scott, 2012).



Downsizing may meet an immediate need to reduce recurrent expenses (Chen et al., 2014). Moreover, an organization's leadership should ensure it has the correct amount of employees and keep underutilization to a minimum (Luan et al., 2013). Downsizing may eliminate underutilization (Greene & Kirton, 2011) and may help leadership regain control of finances during times of budgetary constraints (Van Dierendock & Jacobs, 2012). Gandolfi and Hansson (2011) argued that it is not advisable to downsize an organization without planning, execution, and assessment by management, which may address and mitigate downsizing challenge.

## Section 2: The Project

This section restates the purpose of the study and discusses the use of (a) guided interviews, (b) data collection tools, (c) techniques, and (d) a comparison of research methods to justify the selection of a qualitative, phenomenological approach. The central research question for this study was: What are the effects of USAF downsizing on the USAF Security Forces career field?

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of the qualitative phenomenological study was to explore, study, and document how downsizing efforts, between 1980 and 2013, have affected the USAF Security Forces career field. The study entailed conducting 24 semistructured interviews, making observations about personnel who have retired in the last 10 years living within 50 miles of an Air Combat Command base, and then analyzing the results using a phenomenological approach. I conducted semistructured interviews either face-to-face or through video calling (Skype or Facetime). In some civilian sectors, the leadership of downsized organizations never realize the long-term effects of their decisions to downsize (Iverson & Zatzick, 2011). Through this research study, I researched downsizing within the USAF Security Forces career field and explored its effects on the career field. In this section, I will discuss my role as the researcher along with the research design, the participants, and the sampling plan. I will discuss the instrumentation along with the data collection method, the analysis, and the interview protocol (provided in Appendix A). Furthermore, I address ethical concerns and conclude this section with a summary.

### **Role of the Researcher**

As the primary source of data collection, it is imperative to identify the roles I performed in this study (Seidman, 2012). The role of a qualitative researcher is to collect and analyze information (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Seidman, 2012). I gathered data through face-to-face interviews or video calling interviews with 24 USAF Security Forces members who have retired in the last 10 years. Furthermore, I analyzed responses from participants' lived experiences during the USAF's downsizing efforts to address the research question. The research participant consent forms are in Appendix A.

I requested permission from each participant and explained the purpose of the study prior to conducting any interviews. Moreover, I provided a statement of the rationale behind the study and the time required of the retired Security Forces members (Allwood, 2012). Furthermore, I gave all participants the reporting procedure for the results, and what the Security Forces career field may gain from the study. Participants' interviews began only after each person had agreed to participate.

I assumed the role of interviewer in this study. Qualitative interviews provide meaning on a topic through the exchange of questions and responses (Janesick, 2014). To ensure a successful interview, the researcher should plan and structure interviews to gather needed information (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Seidman, 2012). Interview questions are open-ended and comprised of background questions, questions related to downsizing, and descriptive questions. Each question draws different perspectives from lived experiences that provided information for the study.

Participants who agreed to have their responses recorded received audio recordings of their interviews. Participants who did not want their voices recorded had their responses transcribed. In this study, participants' responses generated data regarding how the USAF's downsizing efforts have affected the USAF Security Forces career field.

I also adopted the role of evaluator and analyzed the collected data. Analysis and evaluation of information drawn from responses to the interview questions took place upon completion of the interviews. Analysis and the search for themes helped determine the perceived effects of USAF downsizing efforts. Seidman (2012) stated that the researcher may be a source of bias; therefore, I avoided leading the participants' answers in a negative or positive direction by not reacting emotionally to their responses. All participants were given a copy of the interview questions 15 minutes prior to their interviews. As the researcher, I did not rephrase the interview questions. I repeated the interview questions when participants asked for further explanation.

Interpretation of the collected data was through my professional knowledge of the Security Forces career field. As the researcher, I ensured clarity of concepts, purpose, and method before and after the semistructured interviews (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Seidman, 2012). I have served in the USAF Security Forces career field for 9 years. I served at six different Air Force bases (Ellsworth, Kunsan, Spangdahlem, Bagram, Balad, and Yokota) covering four different commands (Air Combat Command, Pacific Air Forces, United States Air Forces in Europe, and Central Air Forces). The majority of my military experience has been at the squadron level. Moreover, I have a tactical working

knowledge of Security Forces operations, and, at the time of the study, I served under the same command (Air Combat Command) as did the participants.

Through informal conversations, I observed how the change within the USAF Security Forces career field is a common topic of discussion. Although the information from the conversations was similar to the subject of this study, it was anecdotal because there has never been a study on the effects of downsizing on the United States Security Forces career field.

### **Participants**

All respondents were stakeholders of the USAF. All 24 participants voluntarily retired in the last 10 years, worked in a Security Forces Squadron, and at the time of the interviews lived within 50 miles from a base in the Air Combat Command region. I used purposeful and snowball sampling techniques to identify retired USAF members. Moreover, of the 24 respondents, 19 were retired Senior Noncommissioned Officers (SNCOs), ranging from the grade of E-7 through E-9, and four retired commissioned officers. The responses from the SNCOs and commissioned officers ensured that members are, or have held positions in, senior leadership roles, have a depth of experience, and have provided input on the decision-making process of the squadron.

For this study I provided anonymity to all participants. I use pseudonyms, known only by me, to mask any information that may identify a participant. To maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants, I did not mention their identities or the location where the interviews took place. Furthermore, I did not force participants to answer any questions they did not feel comfortable answering. Participants were free to

terminate participation in the study at any point, without any accountability or negative implications.

I requested that prior to conducting an interview, all participants give consent to have their interviews recorded. When an interview subject did not want his or her voice recorded, I transcribed their answers. All interviews took place in a secure and private area to ensure confidentiality, while assuring that the participant was comfortable. There are no participants' names stored with the recordings.

Prior to all interviews, I provided the data protection and safekeeping procedures to all the participants. Furthermore, I informed participants that all voice recordings and notes gathered at the interviews will convert to electronic records and be protected by a password known only to me. Electronic data are password-protected on my personal computer. Data will remain stored for 5 years after the completion of this study, and destruction of data will take place after 5 years.

### **Research Method and Design**

The purpose of this study was to explore the effects of the USAF downsizing efforts through the lived experiences of Security Forces members who survived the downsizing efforts between 1980 and 2013. Siedman (2012) stated that the advantage of qualitative research is the richness of the collected data, especially in interviews and focus group discussions. In this study, there were no factors or distinct variables to consider; therefore, I took advantage of the richness of data that the qualitative method offered by using interviews.

Using a qualitative study, researchers are able to collect and analyze data to provide an in-depth exposition of a given phenomenon (Mitchell & Jolley, 2012). In this study, the phenomenon explored was the perceived effects of downsizing efforts of the USAF. Maxwell (2012) defined a qualitative phenomenological study as a method that provides tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their contexts. Through proper execution of this methodology, the researcher can: (a) explore individuals, (b) organizations, (c) relationships, (d) communities, or (e) programs. The analysis can further aid in policy or project plan developments (Maxwell, 2012).

### **Method**

The purpose of this study was to explore the thoughts and lived experiences of the participants; a quantitative study was not appropriate. Scholars use quantitative studies when they search for the degree of impact a quantitative event has on a phenomenon (Maxwell, 2012). A mixed-methods approach was not chosen for this study because I chose to explore the perceived effects of downsizing through the lived experiences of the participant pool. While a mixed-methods approach would have fit this study, data collection for a smaller group required for a qualitative approach was effective and efficient (Malina et al., 2011). In this study, I used the thoughts and lived experiences of the participants and explored the phenomenon; therefore, the qualitative research approach was appropriate.

### **Design**

Understanding research design is critical for the researcher to structure questions that meet the purpose of the study (Mitchell & Jolley, 2012). In this study, where social

sciences are key factors, the design included all necessary aspects and allowed for nonbiased analysis (Mitchell & Jolley, 2012). A phenomenological design best suited this study because phenomenology involves gathering the lived experiences of a group of individuals to describe what all participants have in common (Seidman, 2012).

In the research design of this study, I used analysis and evaluation of the responses collected to explore the participants' lived experiences of how downsizing has impacted the USAF Security Forces career field. Moreover, a phenomenological design enabled me to analyze the downsizing efforts on both long- and short-term effects as well as effects on (a) job skill, (b) proficiency, (c) roles, and (d) operations through the lived experiences of Security Forces members who had retired in the last 10 years. The semistructured interview data collection process, with researcher observation, allowed for flexibility in the analysis of the participants' responses (Seidman, 2012). A qualitative, phenomenological approach is capable of generating results that are rich and detailed.

Researchers may consider a variety of possible designs for the analysis of qualitative data. Phenomenology, grounded theory, content analysis, and qualitative case studies used in conducting a qualitative study. The phenomenological design is suited for researchers who want to obtain the in-depth, lived experiences of the participants (Newman, Lim, & Pineda, 2013). A phenomenological approach was optimum for the study because it allowed me to assess the lived experiences of USAF Security Forces members.

Grounded theory is appropriate when the purpose of the study is to generate a theory from the data (Reiter et al., 2011). Content analysis from collected information is



expected to produce themes emerging from the interviews. Since I had no intention to prove, disprove, or build an underlying theory from the investigation, these actions limited researcher bias (Humble, 2012; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Content analysis requires prolonged engagement in the field of study to facilitate the development of themes and ideas (Humble, 2012; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). A qualitative case study is a research design approach that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources (Allwood, 2012). Block, Wheeland, and Rosenberg (2014) argued that case studies are appropriate when the focus is on an event. A case study is one that deals with determining and understanding real life events, such as individual life cycles, group behavior, and organizational processes (Yin, 2011). While a case study design could have been applied to this study, it was not feasible because case studies require multiple sources of information, observations, interviews, audio-visual materials, documents, and reports (Ford et al., 2012). A complete case study would not have been possible for this project because of limited access to documents and reports associative with the participant pool. Instead, the flexibility and functionality of semistructured interviews within a qualitative, phenomenological research design enabled me to gain insight into the effects of USAF Security Forces' downsizing with the simplicity and ease in the process.

### **Population and Sampling**

The USAF's leadership downsized the number of active duty military members from 535,233 to 331,700 within two decades, between 1990 and 2010 (Sundberg, 2013). To capture the effects of downsizing in the USAF, I conducted qualitative

phenomenological interviews on personnel that served from 1984 to 2014. All participants were also from the enlisted ranks of E-7 (Master Sergeant) through E-9 (Chief Master Sergeant), or the commissioned ranks of O-3 (Captain) through O-6 (Colonel). The timeframe and experience level of the participant pool ensured involvement in decision making and leadership roles during their careers.

### **Targeted Population**

I selected the participants for this study from a population of retired personnel residing within the Air Combat Command region who have survived one or more downsizing initiatives during the period 1984 to 2014. The study participants retired in the last 10 years and experienced the immediate and long-term effects of downsizing. Furthermore, the participants engaged with stakeholders and leadership during a number of years both in a professional and developmental capacity. The information obtained from this study may be essential in solidifying the findings of the study and may help to balance the opinions and responses on the effects of downsizing in the USAF.

### **Sampling Technique and Sample Size**

I interviewed the participants and collected data through both a purposeful sample and snowball sampling (Allwood, 2012). This process allowed me to access participants directly by engaging them in a personal interview. It took 3 weeks to identify and seek appointments from personnel I have served with and who have retired in the last 10 years. Once I exhausted all the personnel that I served with, I asked them for references and contact information of Security Forces members they have served with and who retired in the last 10 years.

I combined purposeful and snowball sampling techniques for this study. This combination of sampling methods allowed me to obtain information from extended associations, through previous acquaintances (Allwood, 2012). Snowball sampling involves requesting references from the participants identified by the purposeful sampling (Allwood, 2012). The snowball sampling technique is used where the populations may be difficult for researchers to access (Allwood, 2012).

O'Reilly and Parker (2013) noted that for qualitative studies, the required sample size will depend on whether the results have reached theme saturation. Saturation is achieved when there is no new data discovered from the interviews (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Typically, qualitative studies use 20 to 30 participants to achieve theme saturation (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013).

I used purposeful and snowball sampling because of the advantage of accessibility. This technique is faster, less expensive, and is an accurate method of sampling participants (Allwood, 2012). The combination of purposive and snowball sampling adds technical value and simplicity to research, and it provides a process for expedient collection of information from study participants (Allwood, 2012). Purposeful sampling added value to the results of the study through production of comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the qualitative data (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

Nineteen respondents were retired SNCOs, ranging from the grade of E-7 through E-9, and 5 were commissioned officers. The input of retired SNCOs and commissioned officers ensured the participants' involvement in leadership roles, had a depth of experience, and provided input on the decision-making process of the squadron.

### **Ethical Research**

I assured participants' confidentiality in this study by not requiring respondents to provide their names during the interviews. Pseudonyms provided anonymity to all participants and for all their responses. Furthermore, all details of the study were provided to the participants with clarity and no deceptions regarding the purpose, the process, and the findings of the study (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013).

Participation during the interview was voluntary. I explained the purpose and nature of the research, and asked the participants to agree to and sign the consent form before conducting each interview. During the research process, all interviews took place in a private setting. I gave all participants the opportunity to stop and leave the interview at any time. I provided a copy of the interview questions 15 minutes prior to recording the expected or targeted contributors to help respondents prepare for the interview questions.

Upon completion of the interview questions, I gave participants the opportunity to provide additional comments they felt were not addressed, after which I conducted a second review of the consent form to assure each participant of their confidentiality. At the completion of the interview, I converted data to a password-protected digital format, and stored these data in a safe for 5 years to prevent data corruption, and to protect the rights of participants. After 5 years all collected data will be destroyed. Moreover, I documented all consent forms from participants. A sample of the participant consent form is in Appendix A.

## **Data Collection**

### **Instrument**

Qualitative data provided detailed information of the opinions and attitudes of the participants (Qu & Dumay, 2011). To understand the effect downsizing had on the USAF Security Forces career field between 1984 through 2014, I used semistructured interview questions in either a personal face-to-face interview format or by video calling (Skype or Facetime). The interviews were helpful in getting information for the study research because they allowed participants to articulate their responses with detail, unlike a Likert-type scale response in which respondents have to select scaled responses. Anonymity assures all personal information, provided through their responses, remains confidential. Semistructured interviews provided a guideline that kept the interview focused on the effects of downsizing on the USAF Security Forces career field. Prior to each interview, I explained to each participant how they would be provided anonymity, and each participant reviewed the consent form which is in appendix A. A copy of the questions that were asked during the interviews is located in appendix B.

### **Data Collection Technique**

In this study, I used semistructured interviews and researcher observations to gather data. A semistructured interview has a list of questions guided by broad themes in a structured manner (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Semistructured interviews are flexible; thus, the interviewer may vary the flow of interviews with different respondents, depending on the answers of the participants (Qu & Dumay, 2011). I conducted semistructured interviews face-to-face or through video calling (Skype or Facetime).

A qualitative data collection method provided the basis for determining the perceived effects of the USAF downsizing efforts from the perspective of Security Forces members. Separate interviews with participants allowed participants to respond free from the influence and opinions of others. Appendix A contains a copy of the participant consent form, and appendix B contains the interview protocol and a copy of the interview questions.

To collect qualitative data that provide a detailed and rich picture about opinions and attitudes of the respondents (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013), I initiated in-depth interviews with the participants, and focused on their personal lived experiences with downsizing with the possible advantages and disadvantages. Interviews were advantageous for the collection of information for the study, because interviews allowed participants to elaborate on their lived experiences in detail (Yin, 2011).

I employed a qualitative method and a phenomenological design, which provided the advantage of facilitating the collection and analysis of data from participants' responses, voice inflection, and body language (Robson, 2011). Moreover, for this study, I gathered observations on the participants' body language and voice inflections during the interview, the nonverbal cues given were relevant for interpreting a participant's lived experiences (Yin, 2011).

### **Data Organization Techniques**

A voice recorder captured participant responses to interview questions. Responses were transcribed word-for-word for participants that did not want their voices recorded. Upon completion, I assigned each interview a number (P1 through P24) that replaced

names or locations. Upon completion of the research, a succinct summary of the research findings from the data collected is located in Appendix C of this study. During all interviews, I used a reflective research journal, electronic voice recorder, and paper for note taking. Upon completion, I converted all data into a password-protected digital format, and stored the data on my personal computer for 5 years. I will destroy all collected information after 5 years of the completion of this study.

### **Data Analysis Technique**

The following were the interview questions:

1. How many years of service did you have in the United States Air Force?
2. What were the leadership positions you held during your career?
3. How many reductions in forces (RIFs), or downsizings, did you experience during your career?
4. In your experience, how has the USAF Security Forces career field changed from your enlistment/commission date through your retirement date?
5. In your experience with USAF downsizing, what personal or social changes did you see or experience in the Air Force?
6. Considering your lived experiences, what is the difference with the level of mission proficiency now (after downsizing) compared to how it was (before downsizing)?
7. In your experience, how have your responsibilities and expected job duties changed with each rank level as an effect of downsizing? (Airmen, Non

Commissioned Officer, Senior Non Commissioned Officer, Company Grade Officer, Field Grade Officer)

8. In your experience, how have the behaviors and actions of personnel in each rank level changed over time as an effect of downsizing? (Airmen, Non Commissioned Officer, Senior Non Commissioned Officer, Company Grade Officer, Field Grade Officer)
9. How has mentoring and leadership development changed, as an effect of downsizing, over the course of your career?
10. What are the short-term and long-term effects of downsizing that you have experienced?
11. In your experience, how have the wars we fought changed the USAF's downsizing strategy?
12. In your experience, with relation to downsizing, how have advancements in technology changed the USAF with relation to downsizing?
13. Considering your experience, how have advancements in technology changed the Security Forces career field as an effect of downsizing?

An Excel® spreadsheet created a visual depiction of the information collected from the participants. The information presented is consistent with the responses to the research questions of the proposed study. For this study I utilized the Moustakas (1994) modified van Kaam data analysis and a manual data coding process to analyze the content of the information gathered from the interviews. The van Kaam data analysis approach is a qualitative phenomenological research process that allows the researcher to



explore a phenomenon in-depth through the lived experiences of participants and helped identify and create coding schemes to analyze the collected information (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) outlined the seven steps of the modified van Kaam data analysis approach:

1. *Listing and preliminary grouping; horizontalization of interviewees' expressions.* Horizontalization was accomplished by reviewing the responses three times; first to familiarize myself with the responses, second to identify recurring themes and relevant lived experiences with regard to USAF downsizing, and third to ensure I did not miss any relevant points.
2. *Reducing and eliminating:* Two requirements in testing interviewees' expressions were (a) does it contain a moment of experience that is necessary and sufficient for understanding it and (b) is it possible to abstract and label it?
3. *Developing and categorizing themes of the interviewees' lived experiences.*
4. *Checking and identifying the correlation of components and themes for data validation.*
5. *Constructing the significance of the lived experiences described by the interviewees.*
6. *Establishing and differentiating the significance of themes constructed from interviewees' lived experiences.*
7. *Incorporating and constructing meaning from the interviewees' lived experiences.*

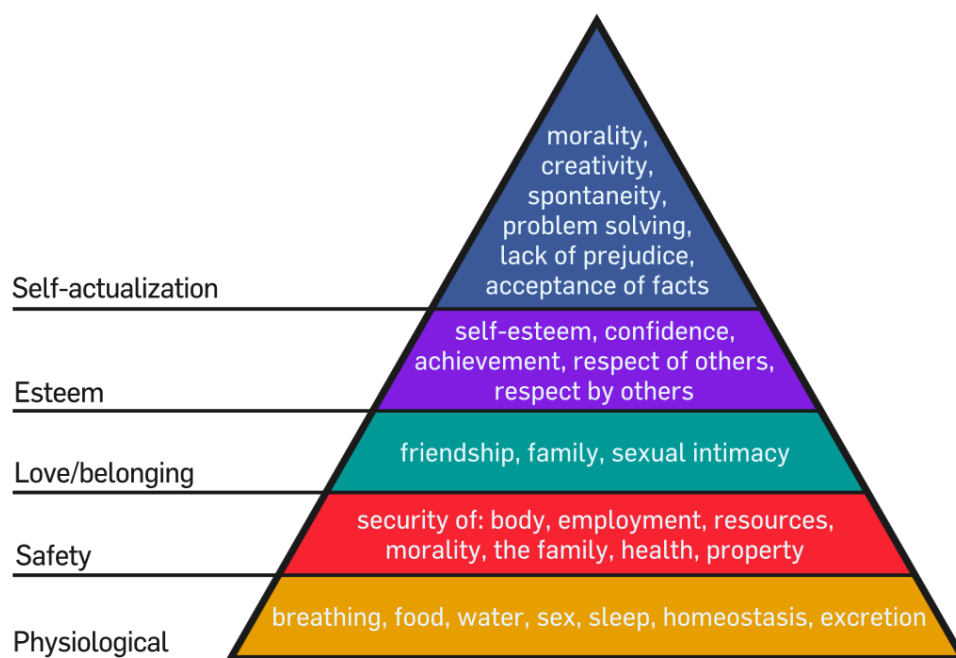
Themes are the significant findings from qualitative research (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Scrutiny-based techniques help identify and separate the various themes (Seidman, 2012). The following are the eight scrutiny-based techniques for the identified themes (Seidman, 2012).

1. *Repetitions* - the occurrence and reoccurrence of ideas.
2. *Indigenous typologies or categories* – familiarity or unfamiliarity of terms.
3. *Metaphors and analogies* – people (or interviewees) may relate their personal lived experiences using metaphors and analogies. Researchers should determine underlying themes from these metaphors and analogies.
4. *Transitions* – shifts in content, shifts in topics, and shifts in vocal tone (and others) may attribute to additional themes.
5. *Similarities and differences* – comparisons of the components of data.
6. *Linguistic connectors* – identifying causal relationship of words. Phrases associated with comparable and incomparable categories, time oriented relationships, and prefixes were adept techniques in identifying themes.
7. *Missing data* - Asking or trying to discover what data was missing was appropriate and important to the qualitative study; however, it was not appropriate to use in short responses to open-ended questions.
8. *Theory-related material* – theorizing of data by finding social and cultural agreements and disagreements (Seidman, 2012).

The created themes categorized concepts that conformed to the specific phenomenon (Seidman, 2012). In this qualitative study, I first identified themes to

proceed with data analysis. Identifying themes was expected to help discover the significant findings in the study (Seidman, 2012). Manual coding generated themes, and categorized and identified the findings section. Manual coding involved identifying, coding, and categorizing common themes from the data collected (Moustakas, 1994).

Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs was the conceptual framework used to analyze data in this study (See Figure 1). The classic Maslow's hierarchy of needs is explained through a pyramid as follows: Level 1—physiological needs, Level 2—safety needs, Level 3—belongingness and love needs, Level 4—self-esteem needs, and Level 5—self-actualization.



*Figure 1.* Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Adapted from: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs [Image]. (2009). Retrieved from [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/60/Maslow%27s\\_Hierarchy\\_of\\_Needs.svg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/60/Maslow%27s_Hierarchy_of_Needs.svg)

Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) described several frameworks for analysis that can be an organization and presentation of data from semistructured interviews. The purpose of these methods was to find the meaning of patterns in the data that provided answers to the research questions. Moreover, Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) discussed seven frameworks of the role of participants: (a) the interaction between the exchanges of individuals, (b) history, (c) theme, (d) resources, (e) challenges associated with beliefs, (f) practices, and (g) values.

For this study, the collected data developed the codes for the information received, rather than preconceived developed codes since there were no exact predetermined outcomes based on studies. I assigned codes to the data I gathered; verbal answers from the interview respondents, and nonverbal cues.

Newman, Lim, and Pineda (2013) mentioned three stages of coding (open coding, axial coding, and selective coding). Open coding involves comparison of data and determining apparent information and what remains unclear, and the researcher starts to tag codes for relevant information and determine emerging categories (Newman et al., 2013). The second phase involved combining and piecing together the data, and grouping together related emerging categories and subcategories (Newman et al., 2013; Robson, 2011). Determination of core and related categories and their connections took place in the final phase. Associated core themes and their relationships linked to each related research questions (Small, 2011).

I utilized an open coding procedure; the coding process of reducing gathered information into smaller groups of themes that described the studied phenomenon. The

themes guided the answers to the research questions. Utilization of comprehensive analysis on the interviews produced codes by word, phrase, sentence, or paragraph (Robson, 2011).

### **Reliability and Validity**

Semistructured interviews provided the information for this phenomenological study (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Reliability on information collected from interviews may be questionable because respondents may waver in their perspectives (Maxwell, 2012). I mitigated this limitation through guided interview questions tested through documentation of participants' actions during the interviews (Block, Wheeland, & Rosenberg, 2014). A semistructured interview process allowed me to explore the participants' responses. Elimination of bias throughout data collection and analysis assured the validity of this study (Cherney et al., 2013). Bias was eliminated by using semistructured interviews and data triangulation, the participant pool accurately represented the Security Forces career field and be from different bases within the Air Combat Command.

### **Reliability**

Reliability of a study is achieved when results are similar and are consistent (Merriam, 2014). In qualitative research, the concept of dependability coincides with consistency or reliability (Seidman, 2012). Therefore, once the guided interviews yielded similar results, the study achieved saturation (Merriam, 2014). All interviews followed the same protocol where participants had a printed copy of the interview questions. Providing printed copies of the interview questions helped avoid bias and prevented me

from steering the participants' answers. Furthermore, for research to be reliable it must have acceptable data collection and data analysis techniques that are free from outside influence (Merriam, 2014).

### **Validity**

Internal validity legitimizes a study's findings and refers to the ability of the data-collection protocol to measure what it is intended to explore (Maxwell, 2012). Through bias elimination, during the entire data collection process, analysis, and recording of the obtained data from the targeted sources; the transcripts of the completed semistructured interviews went through post-interview screening. During post-interview screening, I reviewed participants' responses with them to ensure that I understood their answers, and did not misinterpret any information they provided. Moreover, I reviewed the responses of the participants to ensure each interview question was answered, each participant's response was understood, and there was consistency in the answers even though individual effects of downsizing may draw different results from interviewees.

Credibility was attained through data triangulation as suggested by Seidman (2012).

Assurance of transferability came through obtaining information about the chosen phenomenon from several sources (Robson, 2011). For this study the chosen phenomenon was USAF downsizing effects on the Security Forces career field. The sources for this study are Security Forces members who retired in the last 10 years, and were living within 50 miles of an Air Combat Command base. I addressed transferability through replication logic in the research design phase and comparison of evidence in the data analysis phase (Seidman, 2012). Since there is a degree of uniformity across the

USAF bases, the findings of this study may apply across the USAF Security Forces career field as a whole.

According to Seidman (2012), validity serves as a critical role in qualitative studies since it determines the credibility of the findings obtained from the data gathered. Data triangulation, the method of using multiple research approaches and methods, increases the assurance of validity of my study. Moreover, data triangulation may overcome the bias and unproductiveness of a single method (Ghrayeb, Damodaran, & Vohra, 2011).

According to Ghrayeb, Damodaran, and Vohra (2011), triangulation involves three phases. The first phase involves investigation of commonalities, which I performed among the 24 participants. The second phase involved finding similarities between the open comments and additional explanations provided by each participant. The third phase involved finding interrespondent disagreement among the responses to the same question (Ghrayeb et al., 2011). Maxwell (2012) stated that to ensure *credibility* of information gathered, the study must have clearly written and substantiated interview questions. I used triangulation to compare each person's response with all collected responses, and compared responses with what was in the literature review. Member checking enhanced the validity of the participants' responses (Ghrayeb et al, 2011). I reviewed each participant's responses at the end of each interview to ensure the correct interpretation of all responses. For this study, validity was expected through confidentiality agreements that provided anonymity to all participants, semistructured interview questions, and the participants review of their responses prior to the end of each interview session.

### **Transition and Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to assess the perceived effects of downsizing on the USAF Security Forces career field through the lived experiences of Security Forces members. I conducted face-to-face interviews to collect data, with a qualitative phenomenological approach to analyze the resulting interview transcripts. By ensuring that the data are dependable and credible, it was possible to provide a fair and accurate analysis identifying the effects of downsizing on the USAF Security Forces career field.



### Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Sections 1 and 2 designated the foundation for proposing this doctoral study and its application to business practice. Section 1 introduced the research topic. The intent was to explore the effects the downsizing phenomenon has had on the Security Forces career field. The problem statement established the need for this study; it is critical for an organization's leaders to assess the effects of downsizing to avoid adverse effects (Cascio, 2011). Organizational leadership should mitigate this problem because an incorrectly downsized organization may experience difficulty meeting its objectives (Vicente-Lorente & Zuniga-Vicente, 2012). The loss of experienced employees in an incorrectly downsized organization can compromise an organization's capabilities (Ngirande & Nel, 2012). Section 1 also discussed the conceptual framework. Section 2 contains the role of the researcher and the research approach. The section also presents detailed descriptions and justifications of the research method, research design, and tools used for data collection.

Section 3 contains a detailed analysis of findings based on personal interviews. Based on the data gathered, I organized the findings in a manner that provides clarity to the research question. Section 3 also includes the recommendations for further study, recommendations for action, application to professional practice, and implications for social change. I constructed the conclusions following synthesis of the textual and structural view of interviewed participants.

### Overview of Study

The purpose of the qualitative phenomenological study was to explore, study, and document how downsizing efforts, between 1980 and 2013, affected the USAF Security Forces career field. The goal for this study was to capture and explore the effects of downsizing on this career field and present those findings to the leadership of the USAF Security Forces. The central research question for this study was: *What are the effects of USAF downsizing efforts on the USAF Security Forces career field?* Participants all reported they experienced the effects of the USAF's downsizing efforts through reduced manpower, lower morale, longer work hours, and multiple consequences from the merger of the security and law enforcement specializations.

The target population was Security Forces members who retired in the last ten years, and who had experienced the effects of downsizing during their USAF careers between 1984 and 2014. Furthermore, the participants had engaged with stakeholders and leadership both in a professional and developmental capacity. The data were collected using semistructured interviews, by either face-to-face or video calling on Skype or Facetime. After data analysis of the recorded interviews, I synthesized the perceptions and experiences of the participants to capture and explore the effects of downsizing on the USAF Security Forces career field. A presentation of the findings through themes helped address the research question.

The great man theory, theory of expertise, and social learning theory all provided a contextual framework for this qualitative phenomenological study (Kutz, 2011; Morgan, 2012; Shantz, Alfes, Truss, & Soane, 2013; Truss, Shantz, Soane, Alfes, &

Delbridge, 2013; Zaccaro, 2012). The data collected from the interviews were analyzed using Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. Reviews of existing literature on downsizing were used to explore and analyze the findings of this study. Data gathered indicated that the Security Forces career field had changed due to the USAF's downsizing efforts.

Participants asserted that the overall proficiency and specialization of the Security Forces law enforcement skillset and the nuclear security skillset had degraded. However, participants also asserted that despite the decrease in proficiency and specialization, the Security Forces career field is able to meet the needs of the mission. Participants affirmed that downsizing had negatively affected morale, culture, mindset, leadership, and mentoring.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

The goal in the study was to explore and capture the effects of the USAF's downsizing efforts on the Security Forces career field. During the downsizing process, participants noticed changes to workload, and because of the merger of the career field. Furthermore, downsizing resulted in lowered morale, increased work hours, loss of specialization, mindset change, accelerated promotion rate, increased responsibility, and dependence on technology. The findings indicated that these factors negatively affected the Security Forces career field specialization and increased the workforce's dependence on technology. Despite the increased reliance on technology, the participant pool noted the lack of standardized technology throughout the USAF and training to use technology was absent.

**Participant Pool Demographics**

The participant pool consisted of 24 retired Security Forces members: 19 retired enlisted members, and 5 retired commissioned officers. All participants had a minimum of 20 years of service, with an average of 23 years of service. All participants served at the same timeframe from 1993 to 2003.

Figure 2, on the next page, depicts the range of time in service among the participants. Each bar in Figure 2 depicts the year each participant entered and retired from the USAF. All participants served at the same time from 1993 to 2003, as displayed in the yellow outline. The common timeframe shared by all participants is significant because the USAF has downsized every year since 1990 (Sundberg, 2013).

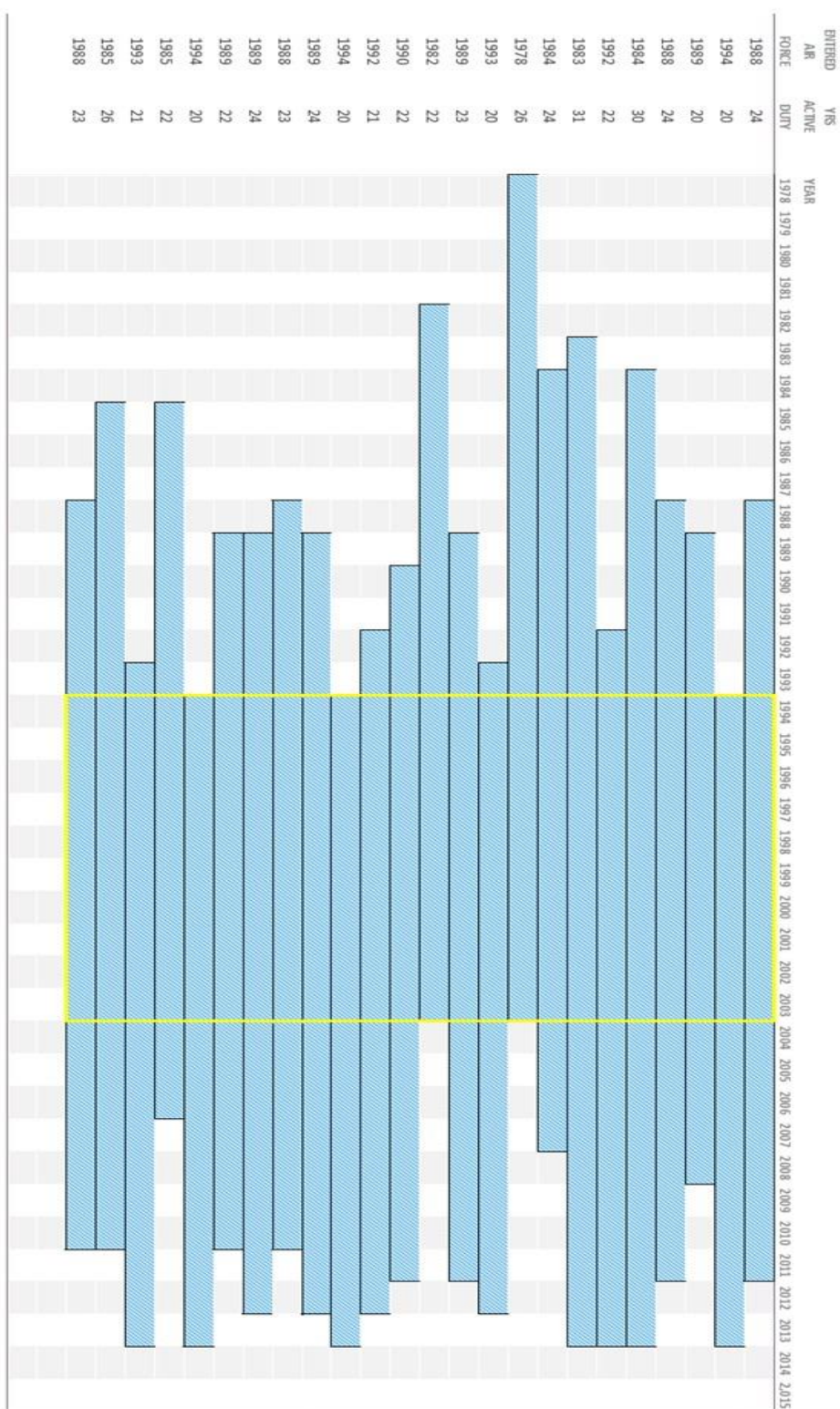


Figure 2. Timeframe of participant pool years of service.

The participant pool served in various locations throughout the world during their USAF careers. The locations of duty assignments were significant because they demonstrate the participants' breadth of experience. The most common duty assignments were: (a) F.E. Warren AFB, WY, (b) Lackland AFB, TX, (c) Lajes AB, Portugal, (d) Incirlik AB, Turkey, (e) Joint Base [JB] Balad, Iraq, and (f) Minot AFB, ND. The table below were the locations where the participants served:

Table 1  
*Participant Pool's Duty Assignments (North America)*

<b>North America</b>		
Clear AS, AK	Scott AFB, IL	Fort Buchanan, Puerto Rico
Eielson AFB, AK	Hanscom AFB, MA	Shaw AFB, SC
Maxwell AFB, AL	JB Andrews, MD	Myrtle Beach, SC
Little Rock AFB, AR	Whiteman AFB, MO	Ellsworth AFB, SD
Davis-Monthan AFB, AZ	Columbus AFB, MS	Goodfellow AFB, TX
Beale AFB, CA	Kessler AFB, MS	Lackland AFB, TX
Edwards AFB, CA	Malmstrom AFB, MT	Hill AFB, UT
Travis AFB, CA	Grand Forks, ND	Alexandria, VA
Vandenberg AFB, CA	Minot AFB, ND	Fairchild AFB, WA
Peterson AFB, CO	JB McGuire-Dix, NJ	McChord AFB, WA
USAF Academy, CO	Cannon AFB, NM	Pentagon, Washington DC
Eglin AFB, FL	Creech AFB, NM	Cheyenne Mtn AFB, WY
Hurlburt AF, FL	Nellis AFB, NV	F.E. Warren AFB, WY
NAS Pensacola, FL	Gryffis AFB, NY	
Moody AFB, GA	Wright-Patterson AFB, OH	
Mountain Home AFB, ID	Altus AFB, OK	

Table 2  
*Participant Pool's Duty Assignments (Central America)*

<b>Central America</b>
Howard AFB, Panama

Table 3  
*Participant Pool's Duty Assignments (Europe)*

<b>Europe</b>		
Bitburg AB, Germany	RAF Alconbury, UK	Incirlik AB, Turkey
Neubrucke, Germany	RAF Greenham Commons, UK	Izmir AB, Turkey
Ramstein AB, Germany	RAF Lakenheath, UK	Lajes AB, Portugal
Sembach AB, Germany	RAF Mildenhall, UK	Taszar AB, Hungary
Spangdahlem AB, Germany	RAF Molesworth, UK	Keflavik AS, Iceland
Templehof, Germany	Aviano AB, Italy	Thule AB, Greenland
Vogelweh AB, Germany	Gheddi AB, Italy	Tusla AB, Bosnia
	NATO base Sigonella, Italy	

Table 4  
*Participant Pool's Duty Assignments (Africa)*

<b>Africa</b>
Cairo West AB, Egypt

Table 5  
*Participant Pool's Duty Assignments (Asia)*

<b>Asia</b>		
Kunsan AB, S. Korea	Anderson AB, Guam	Kadena AB, Japan
Kwangju AB, S. Korea	Clark AB, Philippines	Yokota AB, Japan
Osan AB, S. Korea		
Suwon AB, S. Korea		

Table 6  
*Participant Pool's Duty Assignments (Middle East)*

<b>Middle East</b>		
Bagram AF, Afghanistan	Ali AB, Iraq	Ali Al Salem AB, Kuwait
Camp Eggers, Afghanistan	Camp Adder, Iraq	Al Jaber AB, Kuwait
FOB Salerno, Afghanistan	Camp Bucca, Iraq	Sheik Isa AB, Bahrain
Kabul Int'l Airport, Afghanistan	Camp Sather, Iraq	Dharain AB, Saudi Arabia
Kandahar AF, Afghanistan	Camp Victory, Iraq	Eskan Village, Saudi Arabia
Jalalabad AF, Afghanistan	JB Balad, Iraq	Riyadh AB, Saudi Arabia
Al Dhafra AB, Al Dhafra	Kirkuk AB, Iraq	
Prince Sultan AB, Saudi Arabia		

### **Evidence of Findings**

Some participants expressed disagreement with the USAF's downsizing efforts by the following statements: "Downsizing is counterproductive. It never reaches its intended

purpose” (P6). Participants (P1, P2, P3, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P13, P14, P15, P16, P19, P21, P23) shared their concern for the loss of specialization across the career field and the amount of responsibility placed on younger NCOs.

Some participants expressed that the Security Forces career field is able to meet its mission requirements despite the USAF’s downsizing efforts by the following statements: “Is there a decrease in mission proficiency? Yes. Does that mean there is a mission deficiency? No. I still think we are able to meet the needs of the USAF” (P3). All participants shared that the USAF had changed due to downsizing efforts, advancements in technology, and societal changes.

### **Findings Related to Literature**

Some of the findings of this study were consistent with the literature review relevant to downsizing organizations. Downsizing may have negative effects on morale, proficiency, mentoring, leadership, and may change an organization’s culture (Fallon & Rice, 2011; Flint et al., 2012; Hall, 2012; Luan et al., 2013; Scott, 2012). Research on organizational downsizing exists; however, there was no study found that focused on the downsizing of the USAF Security Forces career field. Cascio (2011) noted that it is critical for an organization’s leaders to assess the effects of downsizing to avoid its adverse effects. Periodic assessment of downsizing efforts may prevent an incorrect reduction of the workforce (Vicente-Lorente & Zuniga-Vicente, 2012), while the loss of experienced employees may compromise an organization’s capabilities (Ngirande & Nel, 2012). The themes that supported the research findings and addressed the research



question: *What were the effects of USAF downsizing on the USAF Security Forces career field?*

**Theme 1: The USAF's downsizing efforts are recurrent.**

The data collected revealed that participants believed that there is a cycle to the USAF's downsizing efforts. The participants gave this cycle different names; "...there is an ebb and flow with Force Shaping, first there is a stagnation amongst a certain rank or tier. Once the stagnation is noticed, a downsizing effort is pushed; and the downsizing creates a gap in experience. To make up for this gap of experience, we accelerate promotion. The accelerated promotion leads to a stagnation at that rank level and the cycle repeats" (P1).

Another participant noted, "the downsizing process creates what I like to call 'the churn.' It is a cycle where the AF tries to balance its rank structure by cutting personnel. Through those personnel cuts, we create 'bathtubs' or 'bubbles' at certain ranks, and to make up for those shortages in the ranks we promote people to fill those positions and the churn repeats. The churn also creates an underlying current of disruption. Down at the unit level, the unit does not fall apart, but it creates inefficiencies. Force shaping is counterproductive" (P2).

"Force Shaping is a self-fulfilling prophecy. It notices there is an overage at a certain rank. To offset, the AF force shapes its people, the force shaping creates a void, to fill the void we promote people early, the people that are not ready for promotion are not able to promote, and stagnate, fulfilling the prophecy" (P3).

The participant pool believed that downsizing has not met the intended purpose of meeting the budgetary constraints while still being able to improve or keep the same level of proficiency, and resulted in decreased proficiency. Furthermore, 17 participants felt that the USAF's downsizing efforts followed a repetitive sequence that never meets its intended end state of balancing the rank structure.

**Similar downsizing approach.** Twenty-one participants noted that the AF downsizing approach had changed little or not changed at all. One change to how the AF downsizes is through the elimination of subpar airmen: "In the '90s, we offered people money to separate, today we use boards. Quality Force boards are used to get rid of troubled troops; we do these now before we do voluntary separations" (P8). However, overall the AF's downsizing approach has not changed. "I think the AF's downsizing efforts have changed, slightly. We still go through our disciplinary problems first, then we ask for voluntary separations, and finally we cut people" (P6). Another participant stated, "the strategy has remained the same, but the rationale has changed" (P5). In addition, another participant believed that the AF's downsizing efforts "are now driven by budgetary constraints, whereas before it was driven by the strategic environment" (P7).

Twenty-one participants shared that they do not believe the USAF's downsizing efforts had changed over the years. Dwyer and Arbelo (2012) noted an organization's downsizing strategy should take into consideration the organization's objectives and structure. Strangleman and Rhodes (2014) found that management should understand the changing needs of the organization and use the best strategy to address them. The USAF

has downsized an average of 10,000 active duty personnel each year from 1990 to 2010; and therefore the objectives and structure of the USAF has changed (Sundberg, 2013).

**Current downsizing is solely budget-driven.** Another theme revealed from the data collection was the AF's recent downsizing efforts were solely budget-driven, compared to the 1990s downsizing efforts driven by the strategic needs of the AF. A participant noted, "the RIF of the '90s was caused by the end of the Cold War and the increase in global terrorism. To meet that need, the AF and Security Forces had to change. There were not as many people needed when the Cold War ended" (P4). Participants noted their experience of feeling lost. "We were all lost for a while after the merger. It took us a while to, but we eventually got through it" (P3). Another participant said it was "tough for me as a supervisor. I had to learn law enforcement skills from my troops while I supervised them" (P6). Rehmen and Naeem (2012) found that organizations that downsized due to budgetary constraints experienced lower performance levels for years after the downsizing effort.

The participant pool highlighted that financial concerns are the primary reason organizations choose to downsize, but also noted that meeting financial goals through the reduction of workers was the biggest challenge. The primary goal of downsizing is to lower operational costs through the reduction of employees (Park & Shaw, 2013). Downsizing to meet budgetary constraints may not always be beneficial (Chipunza & Samuel, 2013). Downsizing experienced employees may compromise an organization's ability to meet its objectives (Ngirande & Nel, 2012). Organizations that choose to

downsize need to provide training for new employees after a financial recovery (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011).

## **Theme 2: Effects of “more with less.”**

Chhinzer and Currie (2014) found that a smaller workforce may reduce the overall production level, but encouraged maximum contribution by employees. One reoccurring phrase and theme by some of the participants was “more with less.” Based on the data collected, the participants perceived that while personnel numbers reduced the USAF Security Forces mission grew, leaving the remaining personnel to accomplish the jobs left by downsizing personnel. “We continue to try to save money and meet the mission, but we are a lot smaller, the numbers are not the same. Yet we are still expected to produce at the same level, if not higher, despite having fewer airmen and less expertise” (P7). Survivors of a downsizing effort often experienced lower morale, heavier workload, diverted attention, and stress (Hall, 2012).

**Lower morale.** The AF’s downsizing efforts has negatively affected morale. While the remaining personnel have carried out the mission requirements, longer work cycles, longer deployments, and loss of good airmen caused a drop in morale. P2 stated, “There is less camaraderie and lowered morale because of the increase in work hours and deployments...less people to share the workload...people that stay work longer hours...people would rather spend their off time with their families than with their coworkers, and that negatively affects morale.” P7’s lived experience shared that downsizing had negatively affected morale, “Increased responsibility, extra duties, coupled with more troops to supervise lowers morale...topped with working 12 hour

shifts and the deployment tempo—of course morale is going to be lower” (P7).

Decreased morale, stress, burnout, and loss of loyalty are effects survivors can experience after downsizing (Fallon & Rice, 2011).

**Longer Work Hours.** A further explanation of “more with less” is that the survivors must complete the responsibilities and duties of the downsized personnel; increasing their workload and hours. The literature review found that when downsizing creates vacancies, survivors were expected to work harder to close the gap (Beckmann, Hielscher, & Pies, 2014). “We are forced to do more with less. Before, there was a vast amount of personnel; it was to the point where we were over-manned. But at that time we were also all working eight-hour shifts and the flight chief was able to reward airmen that did well with EFDs (Earned Free Days). Towards the end of my career, we all worked 12 hour shifts, and it was to the point where we were undermanned, and there were not enough personnel to cover posts” (P9). P10 shared a similar experience with longer work hours due to the AF’s downsizing efforts “It becomes difficult to do more with less people, when I came into the AF in the missile field I was working a three and six with two training days (three work days with six days off, but two of the days off were used for training. Resulting in a five-day work cycle with four days off). Now they work a three and three with one of the three days off for training the increased workload and work cycle has its toll on people.”

**Longer Deployments.** All participants shared the experience that deployments had gotten longer and had become more frequent. P11 stated, “There are more deployments now, and they are longer than before. When I came into the AF,

deployments were four months long, now they are six months, and yearlong deployments were increasing as I was getting closer to retirement.” P12 agreed stating, “We didn’t deploy as many people before, and on top of that, deployments were voluntary...Personnel are not given that option anymore.” P13 also shared a similar experience, “Overall morale has dropped because the smaller the AF gets, the more difficult it gets for the people that remain. There are more deployments and longer deployments; this affects the cohesion of the unit; bases are not as close-knit.”

**Stress on Survivors.** One reason for the drop in morale after downsizing was there was not as much time off, and Security Forces personnel would rather spend their free time with family. “The AF is smaller, so there are fewer people to socialize with; there is less camaraderie and less unity. With the longer work hours, people are more likely to spend their off time with their family” (P14). “With the increase in responsibilities, having to do more with less, and the deployment tempo, people’s stress levels are higher and morale will drop” (P23). The literature review found that increased stress and workforce limitations may negatively affect an organization’s ability to meet its goals (Rehman & Naeem, 2012).

There was a perceived threat of job security with the AF’s downsizing efforts. “The AF downsizing efforts has placed stress on people chosen for downsizing and those that have not been chosen for downsizing. Those not chosen are under the constant stress and worry if their records are good enough or if they may be selected for the next RIF” (P6). Another participant shared a similar experience with the AF downsizing and stated “I had a lot of sharp NCOs voluntarily get out...sharp guys in their mid to early thirties

that figured they might as well start another career...while they were still young enough to do it” (P14). Another participant agreed, “It seemed like my good people were always worried about the RIFs, and my subpar personnel were not as worried...unfortunately the good people got out...and my bad folks stayed” (P4).

Job security and stress may divert and divide employee attention, and affect an organization’s effectiveness (William, Burch, & Mitchell, 2014). While downsizing may be an effective strategy for meeting financial constraints, it may cause poor performance by the remaining employees (Rehman & Naeem, 2012). Fallon and Rice (2011) stated that to solve financial problems, organizations should consider alternatives. Mergers and acquisitions are one of the options to regain profitability (Shook & Roth, 2011).

**Theme 3: There was a culture change due to the merger of security and law enforcement specializations.**

The participants shared the impact the AF’s downsizing efforts in the 1990s, and the subsequent merger of the career field. In a merger, the smaller organization may lose its identity and may take on the identity of the larger organization (Bragger et al., 2013). The information found in the literature review was consistent with the information shared by the participants. The Security Police career field used to have two specializations; law enforcement and security, but then merged and changed its name to Security Forces. “The merger of the ‘90s added stress and confusion for quite some time. Before there were two specializations: Security and Law Enforcement. Personnel came from two different schools and the merger caused a mindset change” (P15). Participants shared the changes the merger caused on the Security Forces career field, “The merger of the career

field was a foundational change, we had to transition from Cold War Security Police roles, responsibilities, and mentality” (P16). Another participant shared a similar experience with the foundational changes and effects of the merger of the Security Forces career field and stated, “The merger took place in 1997 and was caused by the end of the Cold War. The AF and Security Forces had to reposture. General Coleman noticed the rise in global terrorism, and this caused a change in focus” (P17).

Participants shared the positive experiences and effects of the merger and said, “The merger allowed for any Security Forces member to fill any deployment tasking, that was the issue before LE could not fill Security taskings and vice versa. When we were no longer separate career fields, all personnel could fill deployments and taskings” (P18). “The 95/96 drawdown was rapid and quick, from up until the 2000s there was a period of adjustments, we were no longer law enforcement and security, we became Security Forces. During this time, people had to adjust to the changes, or leave the AF, and some good people got out” (P19).

Participants shared the difficulty they experienced adjusting to the changes brought on by the merger of the career field. “While most members were able to stay in their original specialties, this changed after Sept 11. Security Forces was heavily deployed, and we had to adapt to the changes” (P20). “The merger of the career field allowed for more flexibility. All jobs can be done by all personnel” (P22).

**Loss of Specialization.** A prominent theme from the data collected was the loss of law enforcement and nuclear security specialization and expertise. A large workforce promotes specialization, a concept that results in high quality and effectiveness in



production and service delivery, but can run the risk of underutilization (Chhinzer & Currie, 2014). P21 shared, “The merger caused a loss in specialization, before you didn’t have to tell people what to do, they all knew their job.” Also, consistent with the literature review was “lots of experience was lost during the drawdown, with that loss of experience we lost a lot of our specialization” (P22). Many participants shared the loss of law enforcement specialization by the AF’s downsizing efforts “We lost a lot of our basic core law enforcement skills after the merger” (P23). Another participant agreed with the loss of law enforcement skills and added, “Overall proficiency has diminished greatly, but proficiency in LE skills has diminished the most” (P1). Some participants strongly disagreed with the merger of the Security Forces career field but shared the same point about the negative affect downsizing had on specialization “It was a mistake to combine law enforcement and security. Currently, the new airmen have no specialization. This causes problems because before an SF member could PCS with no transition issue; now SF members have to adapt to the base’s different missions: Air Base Defense, Law Enforcement, Physical Security, or Nuclear Security” (P1). Moreover, another participant shared, “The biggest change that I saw was the career field merger. We went from a specialized career field to a career field with a little knowledge in both law enforcement and security. I was an instructor at the Security Police Academy when this happened and to get qualified we were all called in the auditorium and given the test for CATM (Combat Arms Training Management), LE, and security and we were told we would receive new teams to teach the entire course. My opinion is this was a big mistake for our career field” (P5). The experiences shared by the participant pool were consistent with

the literature review. Personnel targeted by downsizing efforts have certain skills, and these skill sets may not be present in the survivors of the downsizing, and may disrupt an organization's cohesiveness (Rehman & Naeem, 2012). Disintegration is possible because the survivors may not specialize in a job skill, which may make them incapable of achieving the same level of proficiency and service (Flint, Maher, & Wielemaker, 2012).

The loss of the law enforcement (LE) skillset was caused by an increase in deployments, and the current security environment, "the current cycle does not allow for specialization in law enforcement skills; a troop goes to pre-deployment training for one month, then deploys for six months, during that six months they are engrained in a deployment skillset and mindset. Then come back to home station for R&R [rest and recuperation], and finally are at home station for four months before they have to deploy again. There is no time to gain those LE skills and perform LE duties and respond to domestics" (P24). These experiences were consistent with the literature review stating lack of specialization, due to downsizing, increases the likeliness of loss of specific job sets due to inadequate changeover and/or personnel (Chhinzer & Currie, 2014).

**Mindset Change.** Interviewed participants shared that the AF's downsizing caused a mindset change among AF Security Forces. Along with decreased job proficiency and level of expertise, downsizing may change the culture of the organization (Bragger et al., 2013; Hall, 2012; Luan et al., 2013; Norman, 2012; Schmidt, Borzillo, & Probst, 2012). "Before, we concentrated on LE and security. Now we are more focused on ABD [Air Base Defense], infantry type skills, and antiterrorism. While we are still

required to perform LE, our report writing has suffered and basic skills like ticket writing.

Our focus has been on our expeditionary skills, instead of home station LE” (P2).

Another participant shared a positive change in the Security Forces with the addition of integrated base defense and the air base defense concept, “A plus note is the new concept of base defense. Instead of standing next to the resources and catching someone where it is too late, we have moved out further with response times to catch the criminal before they arrive at the resource. Integrated base defense has been a great help with the amount of SF deployed and with the manning cutbacks” (P5).

Mindset change was another phrase used by the participant pool, noting that air base defense had been added to the mission focus, and there was a concentration of personal achievement. “There is more of an ABD mindset now to SF” (P18). “We are set for a more diverse intense mission; we are always ready for contingency operations and deployment needs. We have adapted more of an ABD mindset, but at the cost of our LE skills” (P22). “We have no expert knowledge in LE or Security. But we have gotten better as a combatant fighting force” (P24).

**Kinder, Gentler Air Force.** A phrase used by the participant pool was “Kinder Gentler Air Force” alluding that the AF’s approaches to disciplinary issues and leadership have changed because of downsizing. “When I was growing up in the AF, during the days of SAC [Strategic Air Command], there was a cost of insubordination. Not corporal punishment, but in the form of disciplinary paperwork. These were before the days of the kinder, gentler Air Force” (P9). Another participant added that the approach to discipline had changed due to having younger people in supervisory roles “discipline has changed

and gone down... caused by having younger NCOs, we have 20-year olds mentoring 18-year olds. It was easier to give extra duty before for insubordination. It was easier to give paperwork before” (P5). “Discipline was different back then; you could issue extra duty without an LOR/LOC” (P2). Some participants added that the AF had changed due to bureaucratic concerns “We are more political now...more worried about people’s feelings and we allow them to bring their outside influences” (P4). Moreover, participants feel that the AF does not mentor airmen and seeks separation for those that do not meet standards “Throughout my career the AF has not been a one mistake AF. We disciplined people, and we corrected their behaviors. But now we’ve become a one mistake AF. I believe that this in turn has affected people’s work ethic” (P7).

#### **Theme 4: The effects of the accelerated promotion rate.**

**Accelerated Promotion Rate.** A prominent theme from the collected data was that the AF’s downsizing had accelerated the promotion rate, which had affected roles, responsibilities, supervisory skills, mentoring, leadership, and the mindset of the career field. “The promotion rate after the RIF was higher, because we got rid of too many people” (P9). Another participant shared their experience with the accelerated promotion rate caused by the downsizing of the 1990s “To make up for the loss in experience that the AF has gutted from its middle tier, they are forced to increase the promotion rate. This at times leads to people that are not ready for more responsibility to be promoted” (P8). Some of the participants shared noticeable problems with the accelerated promotion rate “With the accelerated promotion rate there is no time to hone specialty, mastery of skills or supervisory skills” (P10). “The AF promotes a lot faster now, before it took

approximately 7 and half years to make SSgt [Staff Sergeant] , today 21 year olds are SSgt, they are just old enough to drink, they lack experience” (P11). “When I was a flight commander there was a young Airman that made SSgt in 2 years. While he may have had the testing ability, I do not believe he had the maturity or experience. We’ve created an environment where a 20 year old is mentoring an 18 year old. I question if he has the correct advice, or the life experience to lead airmen” (P12). “There has been a change in the role of the SSgt, before a SSgt was an expert, and that has changed drastically. As far as growing up it seemed more difficult around ‘96 or ‘97 for the airmen, which became NCOs [noncommissioned officers], to supervise their troops. Their lack of supervision affected the squadron’s training schedule, because their troops had not completed their upgrade training” (P8). “Today’s airmen are not able to meet expectations due to the fact they are younger and have less experience” (P3). “Airmen were held accountable for their actions back in the ‘90s. The expectations have changed a lot due to the fact that SSgts [Staff Sergeants] are now the airmen of the past. They are so new and make rank so fast that the mentality of the TSgts [Technical Sergeants] and MSgts [Master Sergeants] is that most cannot be trusted with important tasks” (P5). The AF’s downsizing efforts caused the culture and manpower changes and in turn produced the new challenges faced by the younger NCOs. An organization may encounter workload challenges with its remaining employees (the survivors) due to increased responsibilities this can lead to decreased job proficiency and lower levels of expertise (Landsbergis, Grzywacz, & LaMontagne, 2012).

**Younger Troops with More Responsibility.** The participant pool perceived that the airmen at the time of this study had more responsibilities compared to the time they were airmen. “We have demanded more from our airmen; that is why we have airmen teaching airmen today” (P15). “Expectations are much higher now; everyone expects you to do more. There is so much responsibility that the quality of work has decreased” (P8). “Before expectations were met, and there were less outside the job responsibilities, now expectations are not met and there are more outside the job responsibilities” (P10). “We have adopted the whole person concept to a fault. Airmen are not responsible for their own personal records with the creation of MyPers. They are responsible for their own financial records through MyPay. They are also responsible for their medical records through TriCare online” (P12). “Responsibility is placed on the individual now. Before airmen had supervisors conduct mandatory three-hour study sessions. Supervisors were more hands on” (P9). “Airmen today are responsible for their own CDCs [Career Development Courses], QC [Quality Control], Community Service, Upgrade training, and CCAF [Community College of the AF]” (P14). “Airmen are now expected to write their own EPRs, when I was an Airman my SSgt asked me ‘Is there anything you’ve done that I don’t know about?’, soliciting input from me to write my EPR, when he was done hand-writing it he walked it over to the Personnelist [sic] SSgt of the CSS, and she typed it up and edited all the errors. Today the responsibility is all on the airmen and their supervisor” (P18).

**Higher Expectations with Increased Responsibilities.** “Responsibilities and expectations have increased. This is caused by doing more with less. In Altus, the quality

of work went down at the reports and analysis, because what was once a job completed by three people, was now done by one person” (P6). “Before you knew what your job was, there was a single focus. Now we have our airmen carry out a lot more duties. I think when you cram a multitude of duties you cannot produce a quality troop. When you ask the airmen to do too much, this produces a subpar Airman” (P7).

**Supervisor to Subordinate Ratio.** The participant pool recognized that NCOs responsibilities have grown as they have more for subordinates and duties than ever before. “Today NCOs are responsible for more troops, where before it was three troops to an NCO, now it ranges from eight to twelve troops per NCO” (P18). “There are too many troops to supervise today. Mentoring was hands on before, because before there was one NCO to two airmen. Now there is one NCO to every six to seven airmen. They have to balance upgrade training and administrative issues. There is less time to focus on mentoring each troop. The troop to NCO ratio cuts the supervisor’s ability to provide quality/quantity time” (P15).

**Mentoring and Leadership.** The accelerated promotion rate have affected mentoring and leadership. Participants shared this experience by stating, “There is not as much time to mentor people, it was easier to delegate before because people had more experience. There is no more mentoring, because NCOs and SNCOs are too busy with their duties” (P19). Another participant shared a mentoring session by their first supervisor comparing it to the mentorship practices of today “Before expectations were laid out early, supervisors were rough and blunt. My first supervisor told me I was not worthy to breathe air yet because I was not at that stage in life yet. SF was much stricter

before. Towards the end of my career it seemed like we would let Airman fail repeatedly and then just push for separation” (P22).

A decision to downsize employees runs the risk of the loss of experienced workers (Schmidt et al., 2012), and in the USAF, the loss of valuable mentors and leaders. Downsizing experienced personnel may cause failures to make appropriate, timely decisions due to a lack of experience, and an appropriate skill level among remaining employees (Scott, 2012).

Adding to the lack of experience from the accelerated promotion rate, and the increase of the number of airmen supervised, poor mentoring and leadership has become a perpetual cycle. “The troops coming up are given poor examples of how to be SNCOs and NCOs, because they are responsible for so much more and more people, they see this and it heavily influences what they will become” (P24).

Furthermore, downsizing has a negative impact on employee loyalty, commitment, and job security (Rehman & Naeem, 2012). Downsizing’s effect on job security may divert or divide an employee’s attention (Hall, 2012; Modrek & Cullen, 2013). The experiences and views shared by the participants on job security and diverted attention supported the literature review. The increased responsibility caused by downsizing has negatively impacted the sense of job security. One participant shared the experience as a shift towards personal interest “The AF now has more of a focus on self-preservation...we are now responsible for our individual training and our records, I believe that this has come at the cost of mentoring and teaching our troops” (P18). Participants shared that the shift toward personal interest had diverted attention away



from job responsibilities “With having a younger AF and the responsibility moving to the individual, I think we created a more selfish AF. You know you have to look out for number 1. I noticed this when I saw the PACAF MAJCOM [Pacific Air Forces Major Command] director get RIFed [Reduction in Forces]. Becoming the PACAF MAJCOM director is a very prestigious position, if you’ve made it there you know you’ve done something right during your career, again this is another distractor from the mission and taking care of your troops, you have to make sure your records are up to date” (P16).

#### **Theme 5: The effects of technology.**

Advancements in technology have produced many changes to the USAF (Sundberg, 2013). The participant pool interview responses acknowledged that there is a growing dependence on technology and that technology has changed the way the AF trains. Yet, despite the advancements and changes brought by technology, it is still not standardized throughout the USAF.

**Dependence on Technology.** The participant pool concurred that technology has changed the AF and Security Forces, and the AF has grown dependent on technology. Dependency on technology increases when organizations downsize (Iverson & Zatzick, 2011). Added efficiency of technology was a shared positive experience by the participant pool one participant shared, “Technology has made things easier. Properly managed programs help you deal with fewer people. It allows us to do more with less” (P10). However, a common consequence with the introduction of technology was the loss of mentoring and supervision, “We are more electronic-based, but this has affected our mentorship and supervision. We expect everything to be done virtually...no time for

hands-on training, hands-on has become the exception, not the rule. There was more time before...more support staff functions, so this allowed for more leadership and mentorship. There were not as many demands on the individual; the support function roles are now your responsibility, and people use personal time to accomplish work needs” (P6). While technology has made the AF more efficient, replacing personnel was a problem shared by many of the participants, “Technology has made us extremely streamlined, we have MyPay and MyPers [programs for your personnel and pay functions], but this has cut our manning and increased pushback when we request SF Augmentees” (P15). Participants cited technology’s negative effect on interpersonal communication, “There is more dependence on technology. People now want to mentor and lead from their desks” (P9). “We have become more dependent on technology; it has made us less personable” (P12).

“Technology has become our first line of defense; it has made our job easier, but at the expense of some people losing their careers. With technology, you don’t need many people. So it has been a factor in the AF’s downsizing. But we run different systems across the AF and the training is lacking” (P18). Consistent with the literature review the data collection found that replacing human labor with technology may affect job security and morale, and an organization should consider these outcomes when downsizing (Cascio, 2011).

**Lack of Standardization for Technology.** An interesting point posited by the participant pool was that while the AF’s leadership is inclined to embrace technological advancement, there is no standardization throughout the AF. Participants shared their experiences with different technological tools, and all mentioned a need to have a

standard throughout the AF; “There is a philosophy that with the right technology we can get rid of people. In some cases, that is true, but we need to establish a standard across the AF” (P17). “Technology has driven significant changes in the AF, it has affected our manpower, but there is no established standard across the AF” (P3). One participant added that there is no allocated funding for technology, and training on how to employ these tools is a concern; “Technology has replaced people, but there is no sustainment for it. There is a lack in training; there is not continuity and uniformity in the AF” (P17). “Technology has been used to compensate for the lack of people, but it is not the same across the AF” (P18).

**Technological Influence on Training.** Using CBTs [Computer-Based Training], technology changed the way the AF trains. The participant pool had a negative opinion on the effectiveness of CBTs. “Our training has suffered. We use CBTs to cover training. I do not think it is effective” (P9). “We cover a lot more things, but not necessarily to the best focus. We have CBTs for everything, and we have the individuals assume the responsibility. This is what I call the ‘CYA [sic] Air Force’ CBTs are not deep; they only provide minimal training and skill. No one is ever the best at anything anymore. As long as people meet the minimum standard, they will meet our needs. But the minimum standard is not good enough” (P8). “People expect you to do more, but it is not as effective. One example is CBTs; I do not believe they are as effective as hands on training or someone teaching” (P12).

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

The findings of the study are relative to all organizations because they may help recognize the effects of downsizing, mergers, and the use of technological advancements. All leaders are responsible for the success of their organization to meet its goals and objectives. The risk associated with the reduction of the Security Forces career field is detrimental to the USAF, because it could lose committed skilled personnel, and this may affect Air Force assets. Insufficient AF manning is harmful to national security, international security, and partnerships because of the nature of the USAF's mission. Participants shared the importance of foreseeing the adverse effects of downsizing. Therefore, it is important for all organizational leadership, military and civilian, to predetermine the effects of downsizing and develop a program to identify the correct personnel to downsize.

This study is relevant to civilian organizations because downsizing of the workforce, mergers, and use of technological advancements may affect their organizational capabilities. Downsizing may meet an immediate need to reduce recurrent expenses, but an organization's leadership needs to assess its downsizing efforts to ensure it has the correct amount of employees, needed skill sets, and specialization (Chen, Grossland, & Luo, 2014; Luan et al., 2013). This study may provide increased awareness of the negative effects of downsizing, and a better understanding of the influences on an organization, culture, and workforce.

The findings of this study are relevant to improving business practice because they capture the effects of specialization, and use of technology. The connection of the

Great Man theory, theory of expertise, and social learning theory may serve as an outline in understanding the effects of downsizing. This study captured the importance of specialization, and the use of technology; and the need to assess proficiency levels and the maintenance, compatibility, and standardization of technology. The assessment of the use and standardization of technology may result in continued proficiency and organization-wide conformity of technological advancements. Furthermore, the results of this study may result in increased morale, mentorship, leadership, and employee development.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The USAF, airmen, other branches of the military, international partners, and civilian organizational leadership may benefit from this study. The USAF Security Forces culture and specialization are important. Leaders should assess and cultivate culture and specialization that enables mission accomplishment. Leaders should preserve specialization and mentorship because of the long-term consequences of downsizing. Leaders should strive to keep dedicated and skilled personnel within the organization.

Airmen may benefit from this research because examining the changes to the Security Forces career field may bring awareness to themselves, their supervisors, and their leadership. Examination may help leaders realize the importance of assessing their airmen's training (specialization), technological tools available to them, and the transferability of skills learned. Moreover, the examination process may help leaders and supervisors to provide mentoring skills and valuable aspects of existing work culture. Moreover, airmen may be able to meet the expectations of their supervisors, become

better mentors and leaders as they promote up the ranks, and keep vital specializations. Downsizing has affected proficiency, and the collected data revealed a degradation of basic law enforcement skills in the Security Forces career field. Downsizing led to replacement of manpower with technological advancements. The collected data revealed that there is an issue with uniformity of technology used across the USAF, the training for use of these technological tools, and funding for upgrades and maintenance of technology. Providing proficiency training and standardized tools to Security Forces airmen, will allow for less time spent with concerns outside the mission, and a higher level of mission accomplishment.

Civilian organizational leadership may benefit from this study because they may observe the cultural changes that happen when choosing to downsize or perform a merger. Osipova (2012) posited that leaders and managers need to realize that downsizing is not always the right solution to budgetary constraints. If an organization chooses to downsize, it should assess its downsizing efforts to avoid adverse effects. An incorrectly downsized organization may experience difficulty meeting its objectives (Vicente-Lorente & Zuniga-Vicente, 2012), while the loss of experienced employees can compromise an organization's capabilities (Ngirande & Nel, 2012).

### **Recommendations for Action**

For leaders to maintain an effective, trained, and responsive force they will need to overcome budgetary constraints and the challenges of the operational environment. An organization cannot achieve its missions, visions, and goals without experienced and trained personnel. Exploring the effects downsizing had on an organization is important

because an incorrectly downsized organization may result in the loss of productivity, effectiveness, and efficiency (Luan et al., 2013). Chhinzer and Currie (2014) found that lack of specialization, due to downsizing, increases the loss of specific job sets due to inadequate changeover or personnel. Wolff (2012) argued that the introduction of new technology to replace functions performed by employees may affect job security and morale, and created a need to train the remaining employees on how to use the new technology.

Based on the findings of this study, interviewed participants felt that the downsizing efforts and subsequent merger of the Security Forces career field caused a loss in specialization. The loss in specialization was specifically in the law enforcement skill set, and that there was a need for an assessment of the compatibility of systems used across the USAF. Security Forces leadership should assess the needs of the overall mission and tailor training around the needs and deficiencies of the Security Forces career field and the USAF. Effective communication between Security Forces leadership, Major Command leadership, and Squadron leadership may help alleviate the loss in specializations with the creation of training programs. Interviewed participants affirmed that training was the key to overcoming deficiencies in skill sets.

Data collected during this study revealed a lack of standardization of technological tools across the Air Force. Interviewed participants shared that some systems used were incompatible with systems used across the USAF, and with other branches of the military. Security Forces leadership and USAF leadership should assess the compatibility of systems used across the USAF, ensure standardization, and make

sure that training on the new systems is transferable across the USAF. Standardized technology and systems may allow for effective use of tools, and provide adequate security across the USAF. Interviewed participants affirmed that standardized technological systems with appropriate training would help Security Forces during and after downsizing efforts.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

I recommend further study on the effects of downsizing based on budgetary constraints. The participant pool all shared their experiences with the downsizing of the 1990s that led to the merger of the career field, and while some did not agree with this changes they understood the need for the downsizing efforts. All participants shared that downsizing actions appeared to driven by budgetary constraints, which they did not believe was beneficial. Future research may wish to compare the results of organizations that have downsized for strategic reasons compared to those who have chosen to downsize for budgetary reasons.

In this study, some of the conclusions were common informal topics of discussion among Security Forces personnel. Further qualitative studies on the effects of downsizing on the USAF with active duty participants may provide detailed insight compared to a quantitative Likert scale approach.

A limitation of this study was the use of a purposeful criterion sampling, by participants that I have served with during my USAF career. Identifying participants that entered the USAF in 1985 may provide insight on how the Security Forces career field was before the USAF's downsizing efforts of the 1990s. Identifying participants that



entered the USAF in 1985 would provide an entire participant pool that had served five years before the USAF's downsizing efforts.

Moreover, future research may determine if leadership is aware of the specializations lost after downsizing efforts, and the effectiveness of communication throughout downsizing. If leaders are not cognizant of the losses to their organization after downsizing, then employees may have to meet objectives despite deficiencies (Boyd, Tuckey, & Winefield, 2014). If organizational leaders do not value their employees' views, the corrections needed to succeed may not take place. Leaders must comprehend and value the views of their employees. Without solicitation of employees' views and assessment throughout the downsizing process, an organization may fail (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2011).

### **Reflections**

Prior to conducting this study, my preconceived idea was that the Security Forces career field lost valuable skillsets and its mentoring and leadership skills due to the USAF's downsizing efforts. I believed that downsizing has negatively affected the Security Forces career field. During the interview process, I remained objective and abstained from personal bias, and I avoided directing participants' answers. The focus was to capture and explore the effects of downsizing on the Security Forces career field and present the data collected on how participants perceived and experienced the downsizing phenomenon.

My preconceived notion that the participants would view the current airmen and NCOs as irresponsible was incorrect. Data revealed that some study participants believed

that airmen today face more challenges and have more responsibility, having to do *more with less*. However, I believe that leaders and the USAF are responsible for providing training and mentoring to NCOs and airmen, and that the current training provided is lacking. What changed my perception was that some participants supported the use of technology, but they stated that our technology was not transferrable across the USAF, that training and maintenance were both deficient, and it was necessary for the USAF to correct these issues.

### **Summary and Study Conclusions**

I used a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of retired USAF Security Forces personnel concerning downsizing. This study is significant because it involves the USAF's three core competencies; (a) developing airmen, (b) technology to war fighting, and (c) integrating operations. None of these competencies can be achieved without the correct number of adequately trained Security Forces. Leaders should take the time to assess and mitigate all the factors affected by downsizing. Gathered data indicated that downsizing negatively affected mentorship and leadership, and that there is an increased dependency on technology due to downsizing efforts.

Downsizing creates involuntary separations for some airmen, while also leaving some survivors questioning their job security. Data revealed that the USAF's downsizing efforts negatively affected the survivors' personal job security and performance because of worries of the future and distrust in the USAF. Leaders should seek to mitigate the risks associated with downsizing to ensure their organizations meet their mission needs.

Therefore, it is important that the workforce views the implementation process of reduction of personnel as fair and communicated properly.

During the interview process, there was consensus that downsizing had changed the Security Forces career field. Interviewed participants indicated that downsizing had affected morale, changed specialization, shaped the culture and mindset, accelerated the promotion rate, and increased dependence on technology. In the future, periodic assessment of the changes in the Security Forces career field might be beneficial for USAF leadership. Evidence from this study revealed that the future of the USAF depends on how effective and efficient leadership is with managing changes to ensure that organizations can meet their objectives and mission needs.

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## Appendix A: Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study of U.S. Air Force downsizing. The researcher is inviting USAF Security Forces members that have retired in the past ten years; enlisted, officer, retirees performing as civilians, to be in the study. This form is part of a process called *informed consent* to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part. This study is being conducted by Winell San Jose de Mesa who is a doctoral student at Walden University. You may already know the researcher as Air Force Security Forces Officer, but this study is separate from that role.

### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to capture and explore the effects of the USAF's downsizing efforts through the lived experiences of USAF Security Forces members, with specificity on downsizing's effect on job proficiency, level of expertise, and the career field as a whole.

### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you would be asked to:

1. Share your lived experiences or views with regard to the downsizing effort of the Air Force.
2. Provide responses to 13 open-ended interview questions, which would last for approximately 20 minutes.
3. Confirm or correct the researcher's interpretation of your voice inflection, body language, and all other non-verbal cues you may give during the interview.
4. Be digitally audio-recorded during the interview to ensure accuracy of gathered data.
5. Review the transcript of the interview to ensure that it is a correct representation of your views.
6. Review findings to ensure accuracy of the data.

Here are some sample interview questions:

1. In your experience, how has the USAF Security Forces career field changed from your enlistment/commission date through your retirement date?

2. What personal or social changes did you see or experience in the Air Force, which you perceived to be related to downsizing?
3. What is the difference with the level of proficiency now (after downsizing) compared to how it was (before downsizing)?

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

This study is voluntary. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during or after the study. You may stop at any time. In addition, please be informed that declining to participate or withdrawing from this study would not negatively affect your relationship with the researcher.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

This type of study involves risks of minor discomfort that can be encountered in daily life, such as emotional distress. Being involved in this study would not pose any risks to a person's safety or wellbeing. The potential benefits of this study may include:

1. Provide empirical evidence of the results of downsizing on the Security Forces career field.
2. A better understanding of the effect of downsizing to active duty Security Forces enlisted personnel.
3. Help determine areas where the Security Forces career field needs to improve.
4. It may help Air Force Security Forces determine vision and direction to keep the Security Forces effective and efficient.

**Privacy:**

Any information you provide would be kept confidential. The researcher would not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. In addition, the researcher would not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data would be kept secure by using a secured safe. Data would be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now. Alternatively, if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via phone at 407-473-9857 or e-mail at [winell.demesa@waldenu.edu](mailto:winell.demesa@waldenu.edu). If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott, who is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **07-24-14-0224410** and it expires on **July 23, 2015**.

**Copy of Summary of the Research Findings:**

Please provide your name and address below if you wish to obtain a copy of the summary of the research findings.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The researcher will provide you a copy of this form for your personal records.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B: Interview Questions

Appendix B lists the open-ended interview questions used to capture the effects of USAF downsizing efforts on the Security Forces career field.

The following are the proposed interview questions:

1. How many years of service did you have in the United States Air Force?
2. What were the leadership positions you held during your career?
3. How many Reductions in Forces (RIFs), or downsizings, did you experience during your career?
4. In your experience, how has the USAF Security Forces career field changed from your enlistment/commission date through your retirement date?
5. What personal or social changes did you see or experience in the Air Force, which you perceived to be related to downsizing?
6. Considering your lived experiences what is the difference with the level of mission proficiency now (after downsizing) compared to how it was (before downsizing)?
7. In your experience, how have your responsibilities and expected job duties changed with each rank level as an effect of downsizing? (Airmen, Non Commissioned Officer, Senior Non Commissioned Officer, Company Grade Officer, Field Grade Officer)
8. In your experience, how have the behaviors and actions of personnel in each rank level changed over time as an effect of downsizing? (Airmen, Non Commissioned

Officer, Senior Non Commissioned Officer, Company Grade Officer, Field Grade Officer)

9. How has mentoring and leadership development changed, as an effect of downsizing, over the course of your career?
10. What are the short-term and long-term effects of downsizing that you have experienced?
11. In your experience, how have the wars we have fought changed the USAF's downsizing strategy?
12. In your experience, with relation to downsizing, have advancements in technology changed the USAF with relation to downsizing?
13. Considering your experience, how have advancements in technology changed your job description in the USAF as an effect of downsizing?



## Curriculum Vitae

Winell S. de Mesa, M.S.

### Personal Information

Date of Birth: 15 March 1981

Place of Birth: Los Angeles, California

Citizenship: United States

### Employment History

U.S. Military

### U.S. MILITARY SERVICE EXPERIENCE

*Active Duty Service Member (AD)/Full-Time  
United States Air Force (Field Grade Officer)*

Oct 2005 – Present

- Feb 2013 – Instructor/Writer (USAF Exchange Officer), US Army Military Police School  
Ft Leonard Wood, MO, U.S.
- Jan 2011 – Operations Officer, Yokota Air Base, Japan
- Nov 2008 – Operations Officer & Antiterrorism Officer, Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany
- Oct 2007 – Air Base Defense Officer & Flight Commander, Kunsan Air Base, Republic Korea
- Oct 2005 – Officer in Charge Training & Resources, Ellsworth Air Force Base, SD, U.S.

### TEACHING EXPERIENCE

*Instructor/Writer, Military Police Basic Officer Leader Course  
US Army Military Police School, Ft Leonard Wood, MO*

Feb 2013 – Present

- Interservice Nonlethal Weapons Instruction (On-Ground – Military equivalent/business training)
- Basic Rifle Marksmanship (On-Ground - Military equivalent/business training)
- Training Management (On-Ground – Military equivalent/business training)
- Use of Force (On-Ground – Military equivalent/business training)
- Military Police Fundamentals (On-Ground – Military equivalent/business training)
- Crimes Against Persons and Property Response (On-Ground – Military equivalent/business training)

*Operations Officer, Officer in Charge of Training  
Yokota Air Base, Japan*

Jan 2011 – Jan 2013

- Active Shooter Response (On-Ground – Military equivalent/business training)
- Mass Casualty Response (On-Ground – Military equivalent/business training)
- Use of OC Pepper Spray (On-Ground – Military equivalent/business training)
- Searching and Handcuffing (On-Ground – Military equivalent/business training)
- Augmentee Training (On-Ground – Military equivalent/business training)
- Field Sobriety Testing (On-Ground – Military equivalent/business training)

*Operations Officer  
Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany*

Nov 2008 – Jan 2011

- Core Vulnerability Assessment Management Program (On-Ground Military equivalent/business training)

*Air Base Defense Officer*  
Kunsan Air Base, South Korea

Oct 2007 – Nov 2008

- Air Base Ground Defense Training (On-Ground – Military equivalent/business training)
- Selective Arming Personnel Training (On-Ground – Military equivalent/business training)

*Officer in Charge Training & Resources*  
Ellsworth Air Force Base, SD, U.S.

Oct 2005 – Oct 2007

- Pre Deployment Training (On-Ground – Military equivalent/business training)
- Sexual Assault Prevention (On-Ground – Military equivalent/business training)
- Searching and Handcuffing Techniques (On-Ground – Military equivalent/business training)
- Self Aid Buddy Care (On-Ground – Military equivalent/business training)

### **FORMAL EDUCATION and PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATIONS**

**Doctor of Business Administration** (D.B.A.), Walden University, **doctoral candidate – ABD**

- 650 S Exeter St, Baltimore, MD 21202

- Accredited by Accreditation Council for Business Schools and the Higher Learning Commission

**Master of Science** (M.S.), Criminal Justice, University of Central Florida, **conferred**, May 2005

- 4000 Central Florida Blvd, Orlando, FL 32816

- Accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges

**Bachelor of Arts** (B.A.), Criminology, University of South Florida, **conferred**, May 2003

- 4202 East Fowler Ave, Tampa, FL 33620

- Accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges

**Trade School Certificate**, Instructor, United States Army Maneuver Support Center of Excellence, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, **awarded**, Aug 2014

**Trade School Certificate**, Foundation Instructor Facilitator Course, Department of the Army, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri

**Trade School Certificate**, Supervisor Liability, FBI Law Enforcement Executive Development Association, **awarded**, Sept 2013

- 5 Great Valley Pkwy, Malvern, PA 19355

- Accredited by the Federal Law Enforcement Training Accreditation

**Trade School Certificate**, Chief Executive Leadership Course, The Southern Police Institute, **awarded**, Aug 2013

- University of Louisville, Louisville, KY 40292

- Accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges

**Trade School Certificate**, Domestic Violence Intervention Training, US Army Military Police School, **awarded**, Mar 2013

- 14030 MSCoE Ln, Ft Leonard Wood, MO 65473

- Accredited by the Federal Law Enforcement Training Accreditation

**Trade School Certificate**, Security Forces Advanced Officer Course, USAF Police Academy, **awarded**, Jan 2010

- 1325 Harmon Drive, Lackland Air Force Base, San Antonio, TX 78241
- Accredited by the Federal Law Enforcement Training Accreditation

**Trade School Certificate**, Antiterrorism Level II, Kapaun Air Station, Germany **awarded**, Jan 2009

- Kapaun Air Station, Germany

**Trade School Certificate**, Security Forces Basic Officer Course, USAF Police Academy, **awarded**, Apr 2005

- 6929 Camp Bullis Rd, San Antonio, TX 78256
- Accredited by the Federal Law Enforcement Training Accreditation